

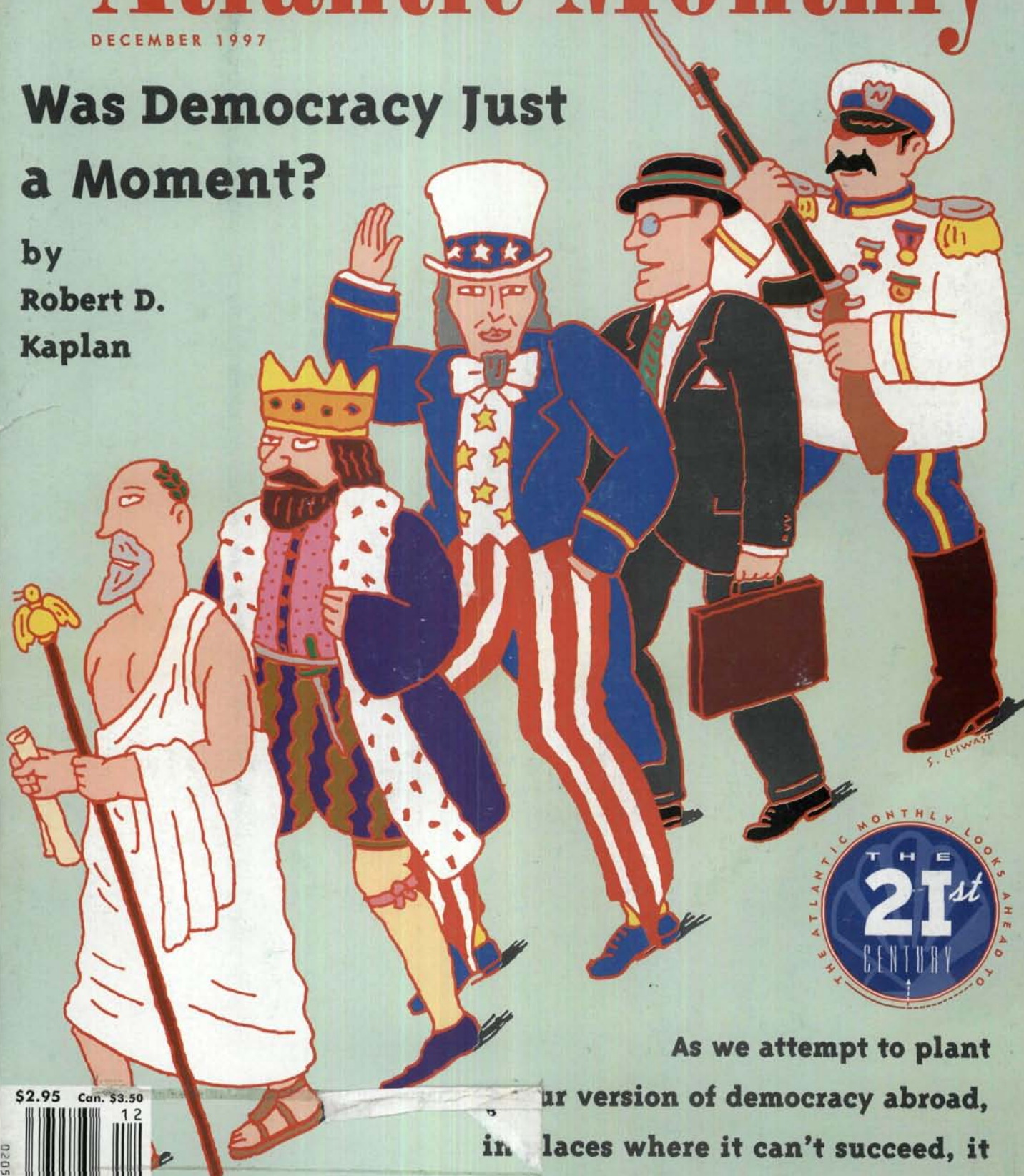
PAUL EHRLICH ON THE ENVIRONMENT / FICTION BY JOHN BARTH

The Atlantic Monthly

DECEMBER 1997

Was Democracy Just a Moment?

by
**Robert D.
Kaplan**



As we attempt to plant
our version of democracy abroad,
in places where it can't succeed, it
may be slipping away from us at home, too

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How would Charles Darwin explain such a thing? "It appears to be part of the phylum 4x4, or SUV," we imagine him thinking. "And yet," he'd wonder, scratching his head, "how do you explain the far smoother ride? The tighter, more responsive

feeling? The surefootedness? The advanced safety features?" Certainly, upon dissection, Mr. Darwin would discover some clues: the four-wheel independent double wishbone suspension, the rack-and-pinion steering, the driver-adaptive,

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electronically controlled five-speed automatic transmission, the full-time four-wheel drive, the front and side air bags, and so on. Still, how to explain such a giant evolution? "Bah!" he'd say, throwing up his hands in resignation. "There must have

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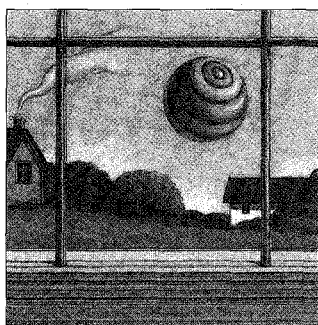


FIXING HEALTH CARE ISN'T
EXACTLY BRAIN SURGERY.
(IF ONLY IT WERE THAT EASY.)

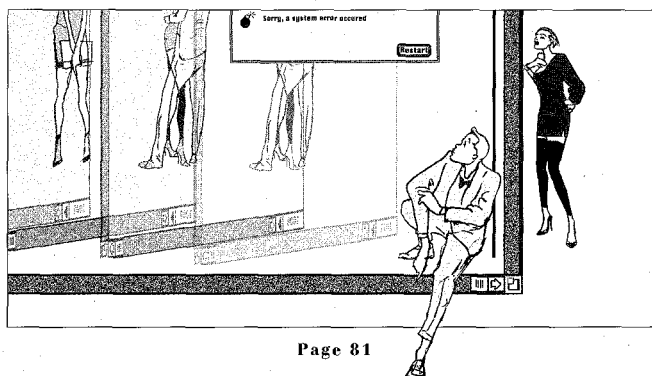
About the only aspect of the health care debate any two people might agree on is that the system needs work. Some might say considerable work. That said, we'd like to weigh in with a few ideas of our own since we're actually in the position to do something about it. ■ First of all, the paramount focus of health care must be quality. It should be the only reason we're in this business—to help raise the quality of care not just for our members, but for all Americans. Which is why we're working to enable a level of health care never available under the old fee-for-service system. ■ Of course, we can't do this alone. So we're joining with academic medicine to make the system better. That's the reason we've pioneered and allocated \$15 million to fund the Academic Medicine and Managed Care Forum. An ongoing gathering of our experts, and those from more than 30 of the nation's leading universities and teaching hospitals. Including Johns Hopkins, Yale, Emory, Baylor and Stanford. Together, we're seeking new ways to reach out and help make sure patients get the health care they need. ■ Already, we send timely reminders that encourage members to see their doctors for immunizations to prevent illness and to get screenings that help physicians diagnose disease early enough to do something about it. If at first they don't respond, we remind and remind again. Just one result is a significant reduction in late-stage breast cancer. ■ To better manage chronic diseases, we've created outreach efforts that have reduced asthma emergencies 60%, promoted eyesight-saving laser therapy for diabetics and improved the quality of life for people with congestive heart failure. ■ In case of rare illness, our National Medical Excellence Program® assigns a nurse case manager who coordinates access to some of the nation's leading specialists and hospitals, when appropriate care is not available locally. It's our policy and it should be everyone's. ■ Frankly, there's more work to be done. And with the stakes so high, we're obligating ourselves to do more than our share of it. Because no matter how complex, it has never been our policy to turn our back on a problem. Whether it's that of a patient, or of an entire health care system.



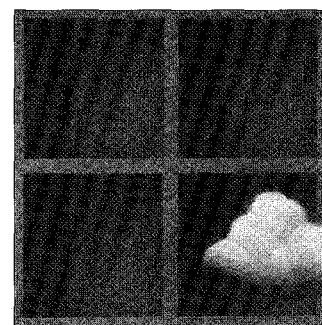
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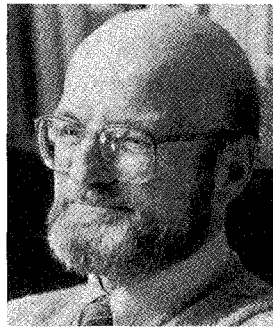
MORE than thirty years ago, in August of 1967, an essay by a distinguished thirty-seven-year-old novelist and critic then teaching at the State University of New York at Buffalo appeared in *The Atlantic Monthly*. The essay was in part an appreciation of the Argentine writer Jorge Luis Borges. It was also an unsparing assessment of a number of popular art forms of the time which, the author slyly noted, had a tendency to "eliminate not only the traditional audience . . . but also the most traditional notion of the artist." The essay's final section speculated that the triumph of Borges's work might be seen as evidence of the "used-upness" of certain literary forms, the "exhaustion of certain possibilities." The author was John Barth, and the essay was titled "The Literature of Exhaustion."

A dozen years or so later, in an *Atlantic* piece titled "The Literature of Replenishment," Barth sought to set the record straight about his earlier "much-misread essay." He had not, he insisted, meant to say "that literature, at least fiction, is *kaput*." Instead, Barth declared, "The simple burden of my essay was that the forms and modes of art live in human history and are therefore subject to used-upness . . . in other words, that artistic conventions are liable to be . . .

deployed against themselves to generate new and lively work."

Some of that "new and lively work" has appeared in *The Atlantic Monthly*, including Barth's "Lost in the Funhouse" (November, 1967) and, more recently, "Stories of Our Lives" (March, 1995) and "Ever After" (October, 1995).

Barth is now a professor emeritus in the Writing Seminars at Johns Hopkins University, his alma mater (B.A., 1951; M.A., 1952), where since 1973 he has helped to direct one of this country's best-known graduate writing programs. He has taught at Penn State University as well as at SUNY, Buffalo. Barth is the author of ten novels and two collections of short fiction. Three of his books have been nominated for National Book Awards; *Chimera* won the prize in 1973. His work has rarely fit easily into any conventional mode, but it has won many admirers among critics, who cite



ROBERT FARRER

his technical virtuosity, his extensive reading in many disciplines, his wit, and his pervasive concern with aesthetics.

Readers of "Click," the story in this issue, may well wonder whether the narrative form has in Barth's hands been turned on its head—a concern that no doubt would neither surprise nor dismay the story's author. —THE EDITORS

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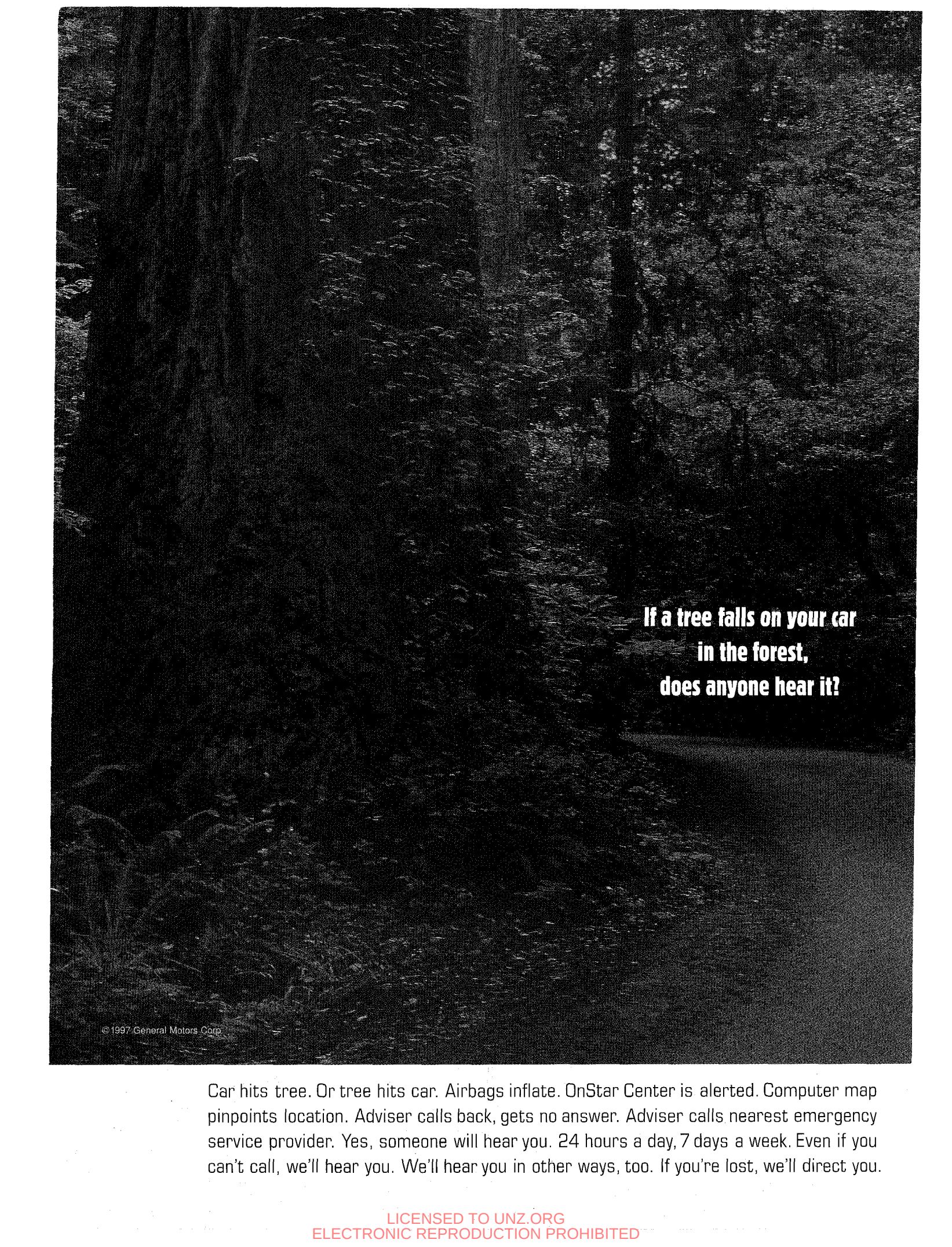
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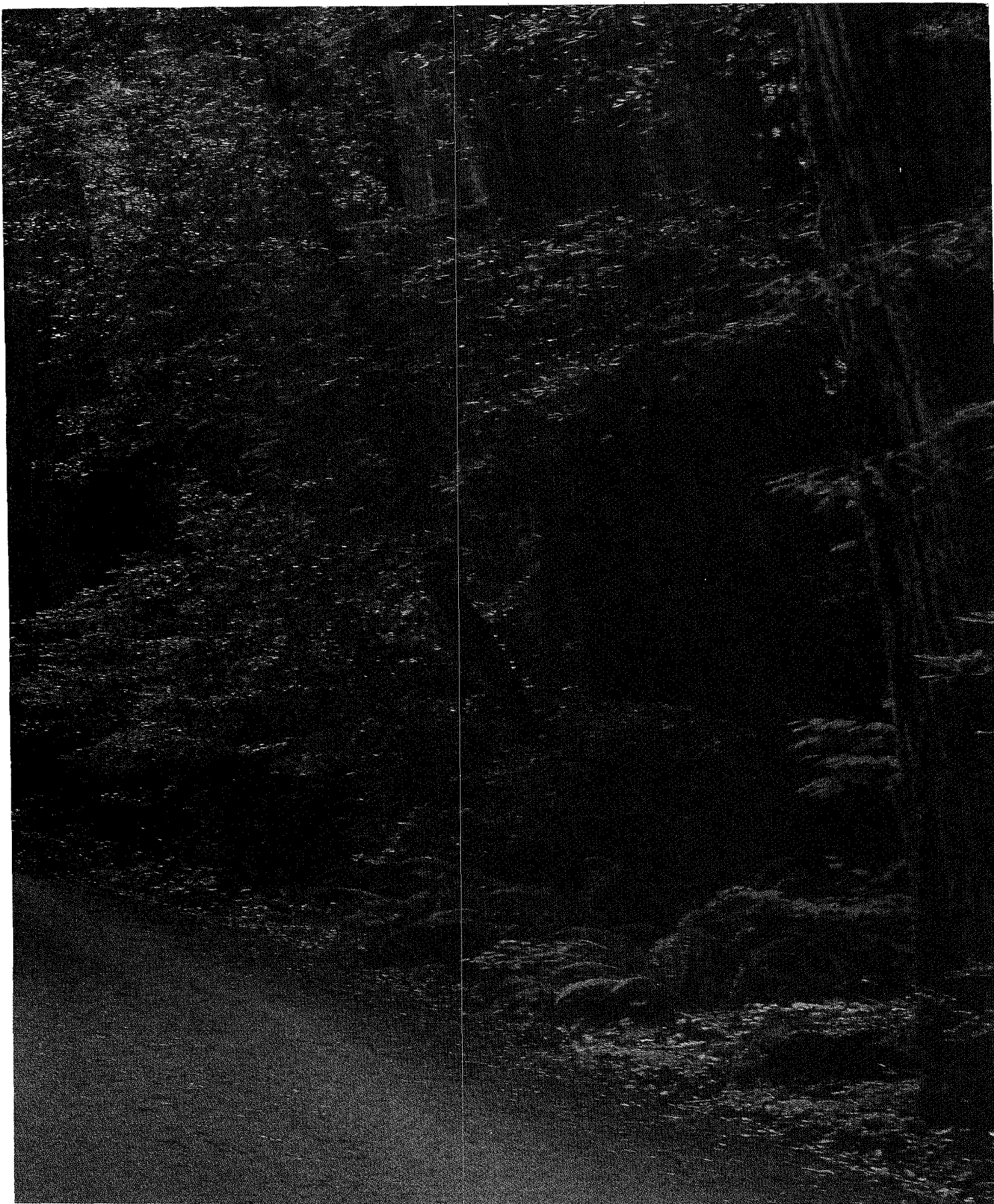
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in the forest,
does anyone hear it?**

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LETTERS

A Grief Like No Other

It's a shame that Eric Schlosser's well-placed compassion for the members of murder victims' families ("A Grief Like No Other," September *Atlantic*) clouds his critical eye when it comes to victims'-rights legal reforms. I can understand his reluctance to be critical. Criticism of victims'-rights policies might come off as callousness toward victims and their families, and no one wants to add to their already unbearable pain.

However, most victims'-rights legal reforms (especially the proposed constitutional amendment) are bad ideas, not the least because they offer no real help to victims and their families. The constitutional amendment won't extend Kathryn Smith's health insurance to help her cope with the murder of her sister, for example. In fact, the primary beneficiaries of victims'-rights policies are lawmakers who use them to fuel punitive (and ineffective) "tough on crime" laws they can brag about at election time.

Jennifer Wood
Glenwillard, Pa.

I had just returned from a three-day round of visits with lawyers and private investigators concerning my son's death when I opened the mailbox and found the September issue of *The Atlantic* staring me in the face.

Having just finished reading Eric Schlosser's cover article, I am dumbfounded by how many others have shared my experiences. The article seemed carefully crafted to point out to readers that the violent death of a loved one is a reality in our communities that could touch anyone at any time.

D. LaBarbera
Luling, Texas

Eric Schlosser quotes one victims'-rights advocate as saying that crime victims simply want "to be notified, to

be present, and to be heard." Although these demands may seem quite modest, they may be extraordinarily expensive to implement.

Consider, for example, the proposal that prosecutors be required to consult with victims before disposing of cases by plea bargain. Any meaningful consultation would surely require at least a few hours of a prosecutor's time; if a prosecutor disposed of even a few cases by plea bargain each week, the proportion of his or her time spent on such consultation would be substantial. Moreover, if the consultation truly "diminish[ed] the prosecutor's freedom to strike a deal," he or she would have to prepare for and appear at a significant number of additional trials. Since most prosecutors are already overworked and underpaid by comparison with their colleagues in the legal profession, prosecutors' offices would have to raise salaries across the board to hire and retain the additional legal staff required to meet this increased workload.

On another note, Schlosser states that victims' rights granted under state law have "proved difficult to enforce," and implies that a federal amendment would remedy this problem by "finally giv[ing] victims' rights a constitutional basis." Should we understand that these rights are difficult to enforce because they often conflict with and are trumped by the constitutional rights of the defendant, and that a federal amendment would solve the problem by curtailing the defendant's rights in such situations? If that is indeed what would follow from the passage of a federal victims'-rights amendment, there should be no dancing around the point.

Kurt Hemr
Boston, Mass.

As I read Eric Schlosser's article in the September issue, I found myself thinking of a hypothetical organization called Parents of Children Executed for Mur-

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ders They Didn't Commit. I trust there are too few of these to constitute an actual organization, but there are some (see *In Spite of Innocence*, by Michael L. Radelet et al., 1992). I write with no thought of resisting the movement toward a better appreciation of victims' needs, but rather to caution against any impulse to suppose that the movement would be furthered by harsher treatment of perpetrators.

Schlosser meticulously avoided any assertion of such a notion, but I am concerned that the emotional intensity of the piece might evoke unwarranted inferences. Such inferences could be prompted by a hunger for vengeance that would do little to serve survivors' genuine interests. I should like to give special emphasis to Schlosser's observation

Even when a trial ends in a verdict of guilty and a sentence that seems appropriate, the family of a murder victim may be left with a hollow feeling. They may realize for the first time that no amount of punishment given to the murderer can relieve their sorrow or bring the victim back to life.

Measures to promote public safety are certainly in order, but incarceration in and of itself contributes little to that end. A given period of imprisonment is commonly supposed to correspond neatly to whatever crime has elicited it. As a consequence, defense lawyers argue—logically enough—that when the period of the sentence has expired, the “debt” to society has been paid, and justice requires restoration of freedom without condition. This pattern of analysis, among others, encourages the contention that criminals' rights are better looked after than victims'. Actually, there are no rights of a criminal as a *criminal* (the rights of a criminal as a person are another matter), but protection of the rights of the *innocent* can benefit the guilty as an undesired consequence.

John Spradley
Pagosa Springs, Colo.

Eric Schlosser's article on the effects of murder on the families who remain was moving, righteous, and unsettling. This article was worth the entire price of subscription.

Steve Borbash
Baltimore, Md.

Eric Schlosser replies:

My article doesn't advocate the death penalty, new “tough on crime” legislation, or any restrictions upon a defendant's civil liberties. My aim was to give the families of murder victims an opportunity to be heard. The proposed victims'-rights amendment to the Constitution has a similar goal—and that is one reason I think it is such a good idea.

The Victims' Bill of Rights Amendment would grant the family of a murder victim more information about their loved one's case, notifying them of a proposed plea bargain, of a trial, of a killer's parole or escape from prison. I cannot see how any of these things could infringe on an innocent defendant's ability to get a fair trial. The presence of a victim's family in the courtroom should not influence a judge or a jury any more than the presence of the defendant's family. Both families should enjoy the right to observe legal proceedings that will forever affect their lives. As for the participation of the victim's family at sentencing, I see no reason to exclude any pertinent information about a convicted murderer's crime. The judge or the jury should have as much information as possible about the crime when choosing the proper sentence.

Years of experience at the state level have shown that victims'-rights legislation is not very expensive to administer. For the most part, it involves sending computer-generated notices to victims' families about upcoming legal proceedings. An amendment to the U.S. Constitution is necessary not only to guarantee victims' rights in federal court but also to ensure a basic set of these rights in every American court. A crime victim's rights merit the same sort of constitutional protection as a defendant's, and the same recourse when they are denied—appeal to a higher court. If allowing the families of murder victims a voice in the criminal-justice system does indeed require additional expenditure, it will be money well spent. At the moment more than half of the 1.1 million inmates in America's prisons are being held for nonviolent offenses. The cost of locking up some of these nonviolent offenders could be put to much better use keeping murderers behind bars and helping their victims' families regain faith in our society and its laws.

Classical Appeal

David Schiff's fine article “Classical Appeal” (August *Atlantic*) demonstrates the futility of orchestras' embracing popular music as a means of fiscal survival. Such pandering cannot work in the long run, because the popular audience does not approach music with the same aesthetic expectations as the concert audience.

Furthermore, popular and concert music have diverged to the point where the former is almost entirely electronic; its volume, aggression, and groove-based percussion do not fit the acoustic ambience of the classical orchestra or its chamber-music derivatives. Schiff makes the point that much modern concert music is also electronic and does not fit the classical orchestra either. If the orchestra is not to become extinct, what should it be playing?

There is no disagreement that the masterpieces of Western concert music, the mainstay of the orchestral repertoire, have been overperformed and overrecorded; orchestras will probably not continue to exist only to perpetuate this repertoire, because there is no point. Thus new music is the only answer. Indeed, the sensible way of extending the Western orchestral and chamber-music tradition is to create new works written for the same media—that is, *acoustically* based music that does not sound out of place alongside eighteenth- and nineteenth-century masterworks.

But doesn't Schiff point out that the audience still doesn't like “new music”? The twentieth-century music of Ravel, Debussy, Bartók, and early Stravinsky is in fact esteemed by the public, which parted with contemporary music only when it embraced atonality. Although a wholesale return to nineteenth-century practice is not necessary, various tonal and melodic styles based on contemporary harmonic practice—as heard in early-twentieth-century music, jazz, and many kinds of popular music—might possibly rekindle audience enthusiasm. Such a limited crossover music, emphasizing acoustic instruments, can revitalize the concert repertoire by extending it, not overthrowing it.

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*The Mannes College of Music
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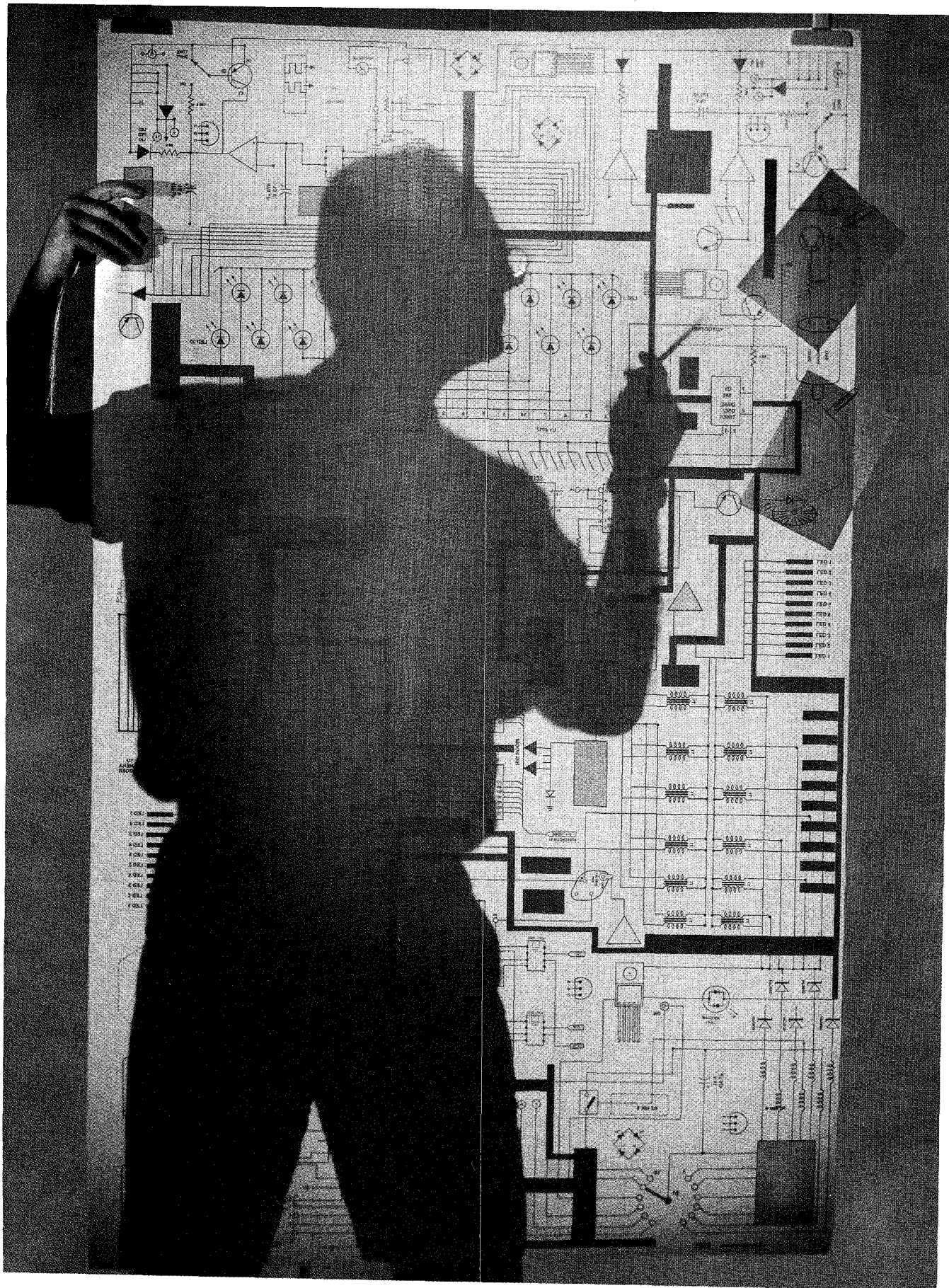
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David Schiff's engaging article stops just this side of accepting Nadia Boulanger's challenge to "take risks!" Schiff only implies, and leaves unanswered, the crucial question: Why perpetuate the symphony orchestra (or any classical-music organization, for that matter) in its aged format, playing Haydn, Brahms, Stravinsky, and Harbison, when bringing popular-music performers into the concerts would fill the hall, balance the books, make the orchestra think it's still alive, and entertain the audience?

The problem begins with the passing statement that "the collapse of music education in the public schools," taken on its own, is "no cause for alarm." Why should we worry about the fad of soccer replacing the fad of music education? Because it is not to create saxophone players that we need music education but, rather, to help develop deep minds, open hearts, and rich souls—an area in which soccer, regardless of its value in building physical coordination and team spirit, will always fall short. Little else in the school day, in fact, can be as lastingly effective as exposure to classical music.

The power of classical music lies not in its entertainment value (although entertainment is its vehicle) but, rather, in its capacity to expand a susceptible—not necessarily schooled—listener's mind, heart, and, ultimately, soul.

David Hoose

Director,

Tallahassee Symphony Orchestra (Fla.)

Music Director,

*The Cantata Singers & Ensemble
Boston, Mass.*

I submit that the future of ensemble music lies with the modern wind orchestra. Our colleges and universities now boast wind orchestras that play as well as most professional orchestras. They are commissioning and performing the music of highly respected composers, including the Pulitzer Prize-winning Karel Husa, Joseph Schwanter, and John Harbison. Indeed, it has become a maxim among composers that if you want your music performed, you should write for wind orchestra.

The distinguished repertoire of the wind orchestra is fresh, exciting, and highly accessible. Audiences like its ap-

pealing sounds and comprehensibility, and musicians appreciate its sophistication and musical integrity. When more professional wind orchestras come into being, contemporary music will once again become a regular part of life for the concertgoing public.

Lawrence D. Harper

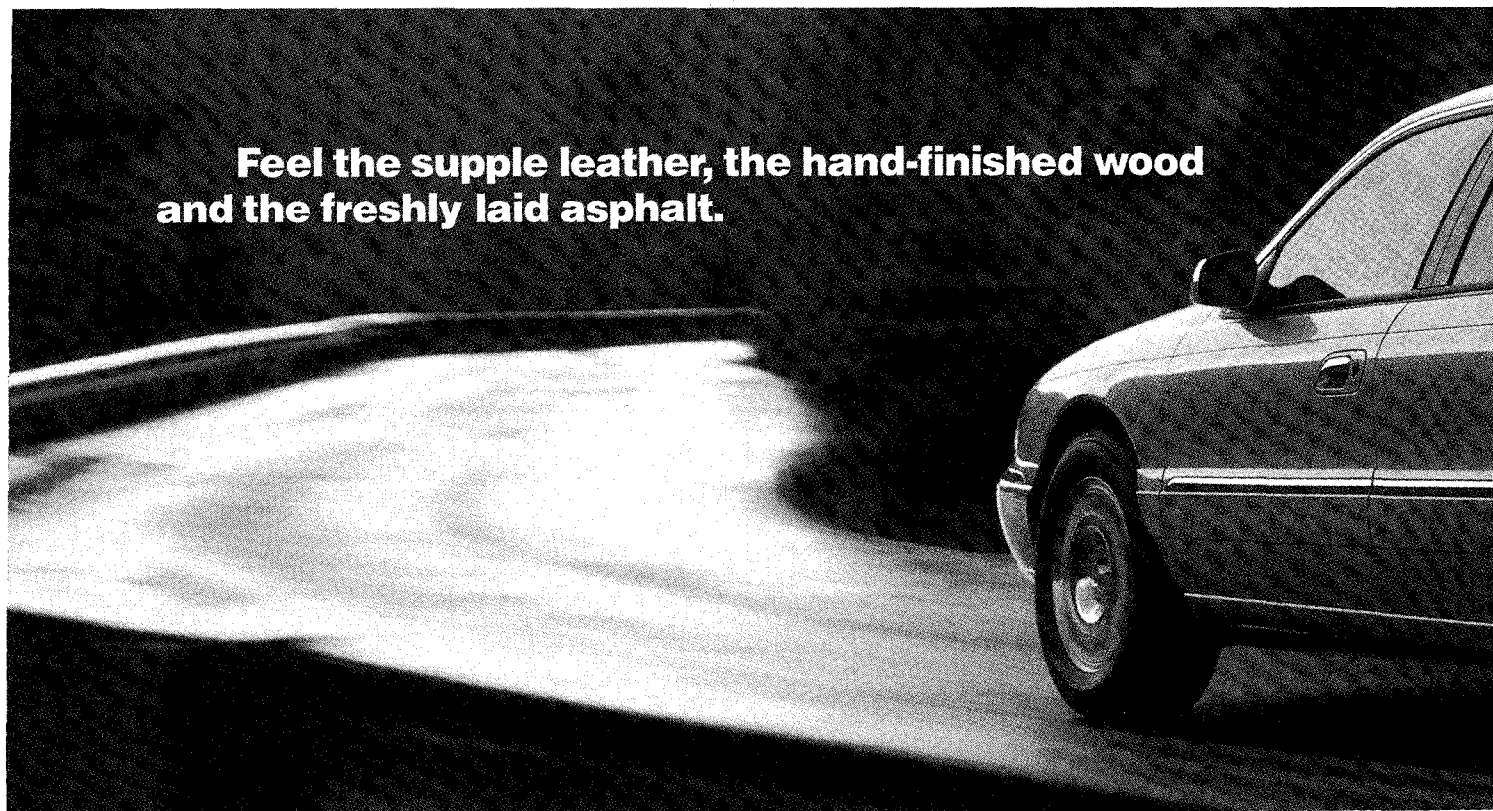
Ithaca College

Ithaca, N.Y.

Critical Theory

I read Frank Kermode's article "The Academy vs. the Humanities" (August *Atlantic*) with great interest, because as a recent graduate of an Ivy League college that embraces race-gender-class criticism, I have experienced firsthand the unfortunate dearth in the academy of what Kermode calls "disinterested critical inquiry." The sentiment in many of my classes was that achieving this kind of objectivity is impossible because, as one professor put it, all our thoughts about art are mediated by invisible cultural forces. The only sure route to "correct" interpretation, then, is through the-

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 **LINCOLN**

ory—which these days is often fueled by particular political and social agendas.

But I wonder if this is a case of mistaking the frame for the picture. Theories—whether they are imbued with race-gender-class ideology or not—are only a means to an end of understanding, and can at best offer only partial explanations of works whose meaning and value extend beyond our always provisional interpretations of them. Only through disinterested critical inquiry should the humanities teach us to seek and experience this complete and self-contained perfection.

Thomas Brett
Minneapolis, Minn.

As one of Frank Kermode's admiring students, I am surprised by his evaluation of the current state of literary studies. He appears to have been persuaded more by the disinterested inquiry of John M. Ellis than by the activities going on either in his own or in adjacent classrooms (where the connivance of [my generation's] professors teaches us that there is no future in literature). I consider myself one of the

race-gender-class—and, I would add, environmental—critics of whom Kermode and Ellis disapprove, so I believe that I can speak for both myself and my less dull and ridiculous colleagues when I say that we love literature. I do not want to remove Shakespeare, or even George Herbert, from the curriculum. Then again, what is so scary about recovering lost literature or encouraging the growth of a new literature? Many of my classmates were and are in the University of Houston's creative-writing program—hardly a group one would suspect of setting out to undermine the privileged status of literature. Competition for enrollment in Kermode's seminars was high, and I went to the trouble of squeezing myself into two of them because I wanted to learn from one of the finest interpreters in the business. Close attention to a work of art is crucial, of course, when one is attempting to evaluate its significance, but this requirement is not necessarily ignored or subverted (far from it) when one attempts to determine the work's relation to its contemporary culture or to our own.

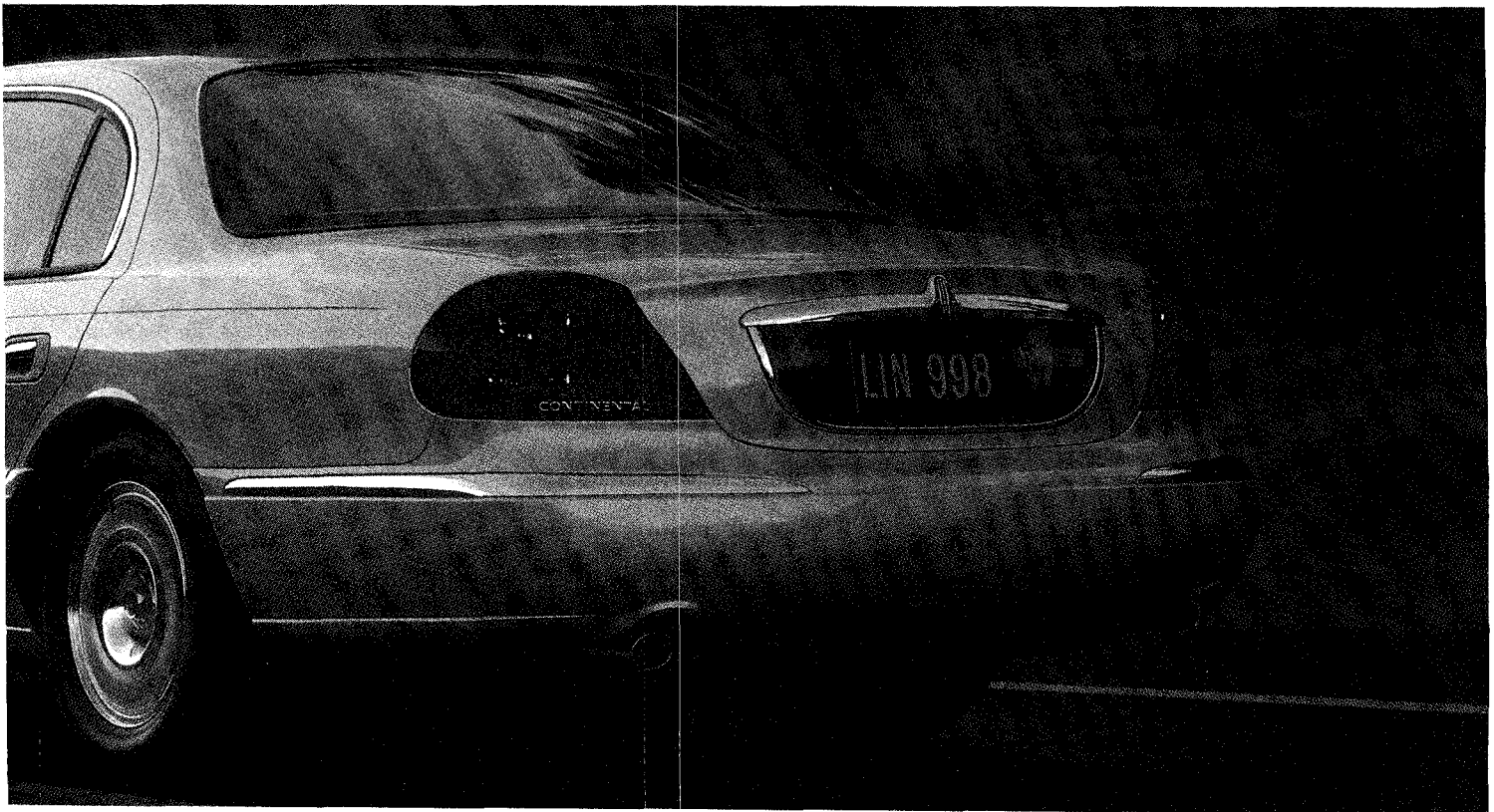
One of my responsibilities as a co-

president of the University of Houston's Graduate English Society is to help organize the Annual English Graduate Intercollegiate Seminar (AEGIS), which Kermode adduces, without naming, as an indicator of the academy's depraved condition. I agree with him when he claims that it is a conference in which "there is hardly a trace of anything that promises *disinterested* critical inquiry." In fact, my colleagues and I will be encouraging graduate students to submit papers that demonstrate some awareness of the interests that are bound up in the production, dissemination, and interpretation of literature. Whether it be Kermodian or Foucauldian, critical practice should question itself. Dissent is not forbidden.

James Langston
Houston, Texas

Frank Kermode replies:

Thomas Brett has it about right, I think. To James Langston, I send friendly greetings; I am glad to know that he means to steer his graduate group in a sensible direction.



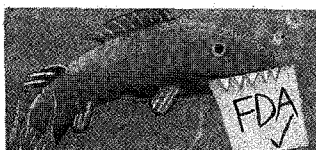
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THE DECEMBER ALMANAC

Government

December 31: A new security measure for domestic flights is scheduled to take effect today. According to a mandate from the Federal Aviation Administration, major airlines must begin to implement a computerized profiling system to identify the passengers likeliest to pose a security risk—for example, those who buy their tickets with cash—and must ensure that those passengers' bags are not placed on the plane until the passengers themselves are on board. The procedure is aimed at foiling the terrorist tactic of placing bombs in unaccompanied luggage. Under this system perhaps 5 percent of all domestic luggage will be matched to passengers. Also this month representatives from some 100 countries will gather in Ottawa to sign a treaty banning antipersonnel land mines. Likely to be absent are officials from the United States and China, which to date have dissented from the ban.



Food

December 18: New Food and Drug Administration rules for the handling and processing of fish and shellfish go into effect today. All seafood handlers must implement the FDA's "hazard analysis critical control point" program, aimed at preventing contamination: they must systematically identify potential dangers, such as hepatitis A and salmonella, and take measures to eliminate them at key points in the production process. The new rules replace a system that consisted only of surprise visits by inspectors to detect contamination in the final product; they bring seafood-handling practices into line with those for meat and poultry.



Health & Safety

December 15: Today Massachusetts is slated to become the first state to require that tobacco companies reveal the nicotine content of and the additives in their cigarettes by brand. According to last year's Massachusetts Ingredient Disclosure Law, cigarette manufacturers must file this information yearly with the state's Department of Public Health, which may publish the information if it deems that doing so would reduce health risks. For years tobacco companies have been required to furnish additive information confidentially to the federal government; in 1994 six of the largest companies made public a list of nearly 600 tobacco additives, but this information was not brand-specific. Among the substances sometimes added to tobacco are ammonia, caffeine, cocoa, and licorice.

Demographics

Plastic surgeons begin their busiest season in December, as many people spend holiday gifts and time off having various body parts refashioned. For example, the members of the American Academy of Facial Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery together performed more than 7,000 nose jobs during the last two weeks of 1993, as compared with an average of fewer than 4,000 during other two-week periods that year. The most common procedures during the winter are facial—for example, eyelid surgery, face-



lifts, laser resurfacing, and chemical peels. In the spring, as beach weather approaches, demand for procedures such as liposuction and breast augmentation rises. Women outnumber men as cosmetic-surgery patients by almost four to one, and show greater variety in their requests; the leading procedure for men has consistently been hair-transplant surgery. However, male interest in other procedures is growing, perhaps buoyed by recent surges in the stock market. One New York plastic surgeon has reported a six-fold increase in the rate of nose jobs and liposuctions he has performed on male stockbrokers in the past two and a half years.



Environment

This winter is expected to bring an unusually strong El Niño, an expanded oceanic warm spot that sometimes develops in the Eastern Tropical Pacific and that affects weather in various ways around the globe. Countries have had longer than usual to prepare, owing to data-recording buoys in the equatorial Pacific, which allowed scientists to predict this winter's El Niño as early as last January. In Peru, where El Niños generally bring flooding, the government has encouraged farmers to plant rice, a crop that tolerates excess water. Farmers in Australia have been selling off their livestock in anticipation of a drought. In California the insurance industry has been educating homeowners about flooding and shoreline erosion. And, on a more positive note, canneries on American Samoa have been gearing up for the schools of tuna that usually follow El Niño's warm water east along the Equator.



The Skies

December 3: The waxing Moon passes just above brilliant Venus and reddish Mars—which lie close together for much of the month—in the southwest just after sunset. **8:** At 10:00 P.M. PST Saturn is occulted, or hidden, by the Moon, an event that can be seen in the southwestern states and Hawaii. **13:** Full Moon, also known this month as the Yule or Long Night Moon. **21:** At 3:05 P.M. EST the Winter Solstice occurs; hours of daylight start to increase.

25 Years Ago

L. E. Sissman, writing in the December, 1972, issue of *The Atlantic Monthly*: "What I'll settle for, and what I'm really, secretly, glad I'm getting [for Christmas], is, apart from a few small but welcome gifts, a holiday season when I expect to sit around with my friends and exchange some real talk—not mere small talk—instead of gifts; when they will make me feel (and I them, I hope) that our friendship has worn and flexed and given for another year with a net gain in suppleness and pertinence; when—it will go without saying because there's no unmawkish way of saying it—we all, severally and collectively, realize, sheltered and fire-warmed somewhere in a snowy, hostile landscape, that the only gift that matters is a spark of brave forthcomingness, an unshuttering of spirit, from another living person, so soon, like us, to disappear."



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But Not Least

*In tribute to those who are forgotten
but not gone*

WHEN Alberta Martin walked into the centennial meeting of the Sons of Confederate Veterans, in Richmond, in August of last year, she was greeted with a five-minute standing ovation. Many of the men and women in the audience openly wept. Martin was being honored for two accomplishments. The first was that seven decades earlier, at the age of twenty-one, she had married William Jasper Martin, an eighty-one-year-old man in Opp, Alabama, who in his youth had served with Company K of the Fourth Alabama Infantry in the Civil War.

And what was Martin's second accomplishment—the one that really brought all the people in that hall to their feet? Had she shown an exceptional devotion to the Lost Cause, or to her husband? Hardly. By her own admission, it was not a passion for the Confederacy that drew her to William Jasper Martin so many years ago. Nor, she explained frankly to a newspaper reporter, was it a passion for William Jasper Martin himself. It was his soldier's pension. "The old man drew about fifty dollars a month," she said. "And you know, that was big money back then."

Indeed, it was not out of some misplaced sense of the romantic that the crowd applauded Alberta Martin. Quite the

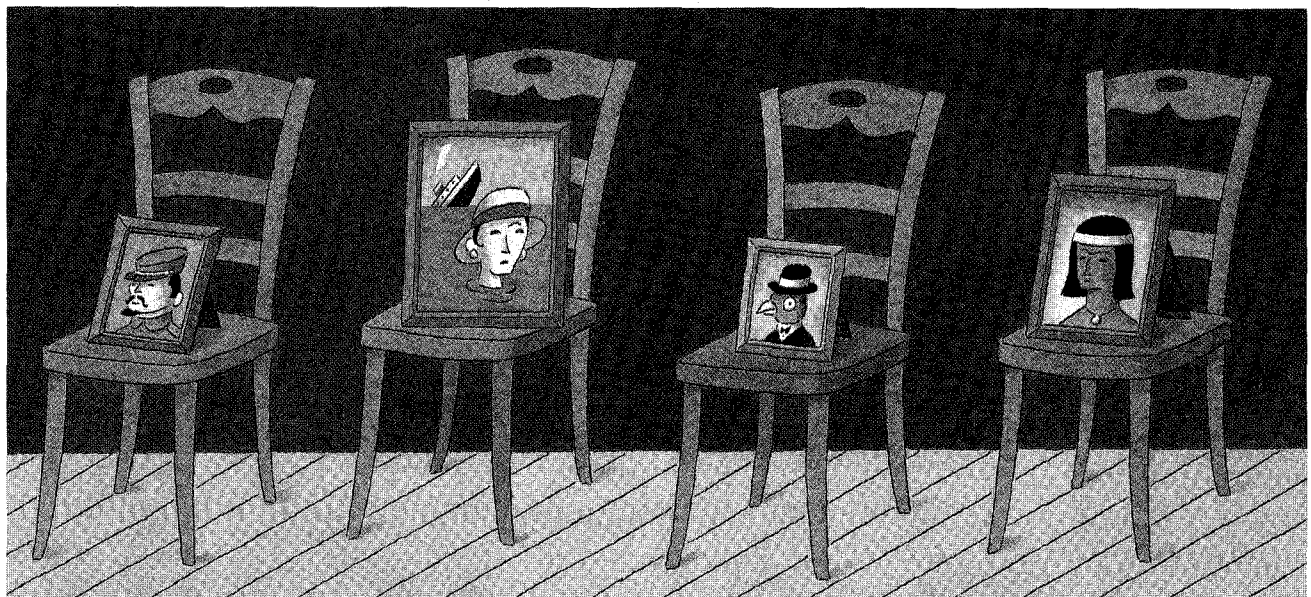
contrary. She was being celebrated for that most pragmatic of achievements, having survived. More specifically, she had survived to the age of eighty-nine, to the year 1996, to the point where she was the only Confederate widow remaining on the planet. Alberta Martin was the last of her kind. Like people everywhere, Americans cannot resist a last.

Witness the case of Albert Woolson, the last surviving Union veteran, who died forty years ago in Duluth, at the age of 109. In October of 1864—after his father, a musician, had died of wounds received at the Battle of Shiloh—the seventeen-year-old Woolson joined Company C of the First Minnesota Volunteer Heavy Artillery Regiment as a drummer boy. By the end of the year he and his regiment had been sent south, where they

joined up with the Army of the Cumberland. Their commander, General George Thomas, was known as the Rock of Chickamauga,

for his daring stand in a battle in eastern Tennessee the year before; by then, though, Thomas's fighting days were mostly behind him, and his army, including the First Minnesota Artillery, spent the spring and summer of 1865 camping out at the base of Lookout Mountain. Albert Woolson saw little, if any, fighting; he almost certainly never fired a shot in anger. Still, his death, ninety-one years after Appomattox, prompted the condolences

by **Richard Rubin**



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of President Dwight D. Eisenhower, who said that Woolson's passing brought sorrow to the heart of every American. Secretary of the Army Wilber Bruckner attended the funeral and burial, as did Senator Hubert Humphrey, a military hon-

*Lasts usually pass
on some kind of moral
lesson, even if they
manage to do so only
inadvertently.*

or guard, a bugle-and-drum corps playing "The Battle Hymn of the Republic," and thousands of total strangers.

Some people might look askance at those thousands who journeyed all the way to Duluth to attend the funeral of a man they'd never met. But I won't. I remember a morning about five years ago when I read in the newspaper that there was but one surviving Spanish-American War veteran, a 106-year-old man named Nathan Cook, who was then residing in a Veterans Administration nursing home in Phoenix. My reaction was to pick up the telephone and call virtually everyone I knew, searching for someone who would drive to Arizona with me for the purpose of looking at—maybe even talking to—such a man.

I never went. It was too far, my friends said. He might be dead by the time we got there. We didn't even know if they would let us in to see him. What if he was senile? Nevertheless, all of them hesitated a bit before declining my invitation. They understood.

The very next day, in the same newspaper, I read the obituary of A. Raymond Brooks, the last American First World War flying ace.

■ ■ ■

"Last" is the most democratic of superlatives. To be first, one must be graced in some way—by birth, circumstance, timing, or an exceptionally ingenious mind. But to be last, all one must do is hang in there. Few of us can aspire to be the first person to walk on Mars, or to find a cure for the common cold, or to

run a 100-meter dash in under nine seconds. But we all have a shot at being the last something or other. We just have to keep on doing whatever we've been doing until no one else is doing it anymore. What could be easier?

Bringing up the rear necessarily carries with it, however, a certain responsibility. Lasts are burdened with the sense that if they don't do it, nobody else will. In their case there *is* nobody else.

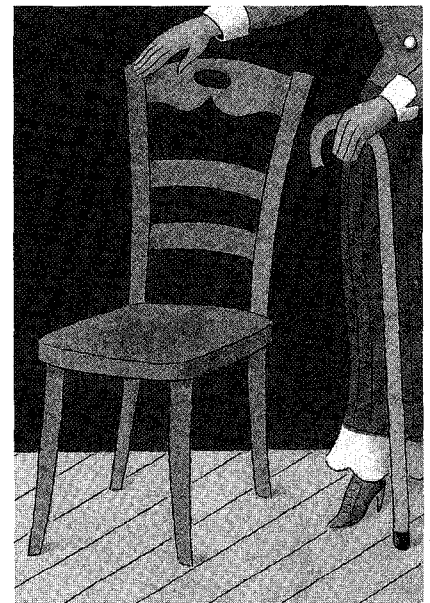
No one, perhaps, knew this better than Eva Hart, who died last year on Valentine's Day, at the age of ninety-one. Hart attained some measure of renown for being the last survivor of the *Titanic* who could remember the disaster (the other remaining survivors had all been too young in 1912 or are too old now to do so). In an interview for a documentary, and later in her autobiography, she recalled being awakened by her father in the middle of the night. She was then seven years old; her father wrapped her in a blanket, carried her outside, and told her to "hold Mummy's hand and be a good girl." She never saw him again. But she watched from a lifeboat as the luxury liner slipped below the ocean's black surface and into the realm of legend. The sight, she said, was something no one could ever forget.

It would be enough for many people to become an interesting footnote to history—to squeeze a spot on TV and a publishing deal out of it, and then disappear. But as a last, Hart knew she had an opportunity and a responsibility, and so she used her small allotment of fame to lobby for greater maritime safety and the preservation of the disaster victims' dignity. She lambasted the White Star Line for not providing enough lifeboats to save her father and the rest of the ship's 1,500 passengers who drowned. She criticized the commercial venture to raise the *Titanic's* sunken hull and salvage its artifacts, likening those who would profit from such undertakings to grave robbers. And she kept up her crusade until she died.

Eva Hart's death was not the first loss of a last that year. A month earlier a man named Carlos Westez had died, without much fanfare, in Worcester, Massachusetts, at the age of seventy-six. Westez, a Native American of Catawba ancestry, was also known as Red Thunder Cloud. According to the Catawba Nation, there are still about 2,500 Catawbas around, most of them in South Carolina. But to a

certain extent the Catawbas died with Red Thunder Cloud: he was thought to be the last living speaker of the Catawba language, an ancient tongue with no written form. Even when Red Thunder Cloud was a child, it was dying, a victim of prejudice. Catawbas were discouraged from learning and speaking their language, for fear that they would become targets of discrimination and derision. By the time Red Thunder Cloud was thirty-six, there was no one left who could converse with him in the language of his ancestors.

Nevertheless, by all accounts he led a full and happy life—no easy feat for a man who throughout his last four decades was well aware that he alone was carrying the burden of his people's history and culture. He did his best to keep it alive, telling Catawba stories, performing Catawba dances, singing Catawba songs; he even made a few recordings in Catawba. Since his death Red Thunder Cloud's fluency in the Catawba language and the extent of his Catawba heritage itself (he was not a registered member of the tribe) have been called into question. If he was in fact fluent in Catawba, his death, on January 8, 1996, would represent the official death of the Catawba language, and it is an exceedingly rare thing to know the exact date of a language's demise. If, however, he was not actually fluent in the tongue—if he merely spoke it to a limited degree, and had committed long passages to memory—he became a surrogate for the last fluent speaker of Catawba. In either case Red Thunder Cloud's life and death are a stern reminder that America



has over the course of the past few centuries lost many languages, and that others—we can never know just how many—are on the verge of disappearing permanently. That is, unfortunately, not an exceedingly rare occurrence.

To be first, one must be graced in some way. But to be last, all one must do is hang in there.

Lasts usually pass on some kind of moral lesson, even if they manage to do so only inadvertently or through the act of dying itself. When Martha the passenger pigeon shut her eyes at the Cincinnati Zoo on September 1, 1914, an entire nation was chastened. Martha was the last of an indigenous American species that just a century earlier had numbered between five billion and nine billion; the ornithologist John James Audubon once recorded seeing a flock pass overhead that literally blackened the sky for hours. The birds' utter and unnatural extinction, in such a brief period, must rank as one of history's greatest crimes against nature. Like the Native American, the passenger pigeon was a victim of ruthless expansionism—the birds were killed for food and sport and the protection of nascent corn crops, but mostly, it seems, they were killed because they were an easy target. After her death Martha's carcass was frozen and shipped to Washington, D.C.; there it was stuffed and put on display at the Smithsonian Institution.

Human beings, it seems, are beset by a constitutional inability to appreciate something fully until it is gone. I am reminded of this almost every time I read the obituary of a famous person, because I usually discover something interesting that makes me wish I had met him or her—that Burt Lancaster got his start in show business as a circus acrobat, or that Ella Fitzgerald is credited with originating the term “re-bop” (from which sprang “be-bop”), or that Timothy Leary was

once arrested by a young deputy named G. Gordon Liddy, or that the former congressman Hamilton Fish could lay claim to being, among many other things, the last surviving member of Walter Camp's All-American football team. It almost makes me wish that newspapers would run people's obituaries while they were still alive. How much might we have learned from Arda C. Bowser (the last surviving member of the Canton Bulldogs, the first NFL championship team), or Anni Albers (the last surviving teacher of the Bauhaus School of Design), or Baron Axel von dem Bussche (the last surviving member of the failed “officers' plot” to kill Adolf Hitler in July of 1944), or curly Joe DeRita (the last surviving member of the Three Stooges)? We will never know, because, with far too few exceptions, we never thought to ask until we read their obituaries. The experience of opportunity forgone is one that, I am quite certain, we will confront repeatedly in the years to come, when we find ourselves reading the obituaries of the last veteran of the First World War, the last Shaker, the last silent-film star, the last sharecropper, and the last Negro League ballplayer. By then, of course, it will once again be too late.

That, I think, is what makes the story of Alberta Martin so special. Her very existence, modest as it was, did not come to light outside Elba, Alabama, until 1990, when news outlets reported that a woman who had just died in South Carolina had been the last surviving Confederate widow. Only then was Martin moved to pick up the phone and alert the media that *she*, at least, was still very much alive. Six years later the State of Alabama granted her a small pension as the widow of a veteran of a war that had been over for 131 years; it also officially designated the discovery of her “a true joy”—as did the Sons of Confederate Veterans, somewhat less officially, with their tearful ovation. The joy, of course, is in getting a chance to recognize a last, and everything it represents, before it has passed into history and we are forced to appreciate it from a distance that renders it intangible and irretrievable. Such a windfall gives us the opportunity to tell ourselves that we will be more vigilant about these things in the future, that this instance of overlooking a real live treasure in our midst will be the . . . well, you know. ☞

THE BOFFINS BAFFLED

What chemistry, we are often asked, takes place in the succulent bosom of the sherry casks where The Macallan lies slumbering for a decade (at least) before it is allowed out to meet the bottle?

The fact is, we do not know.



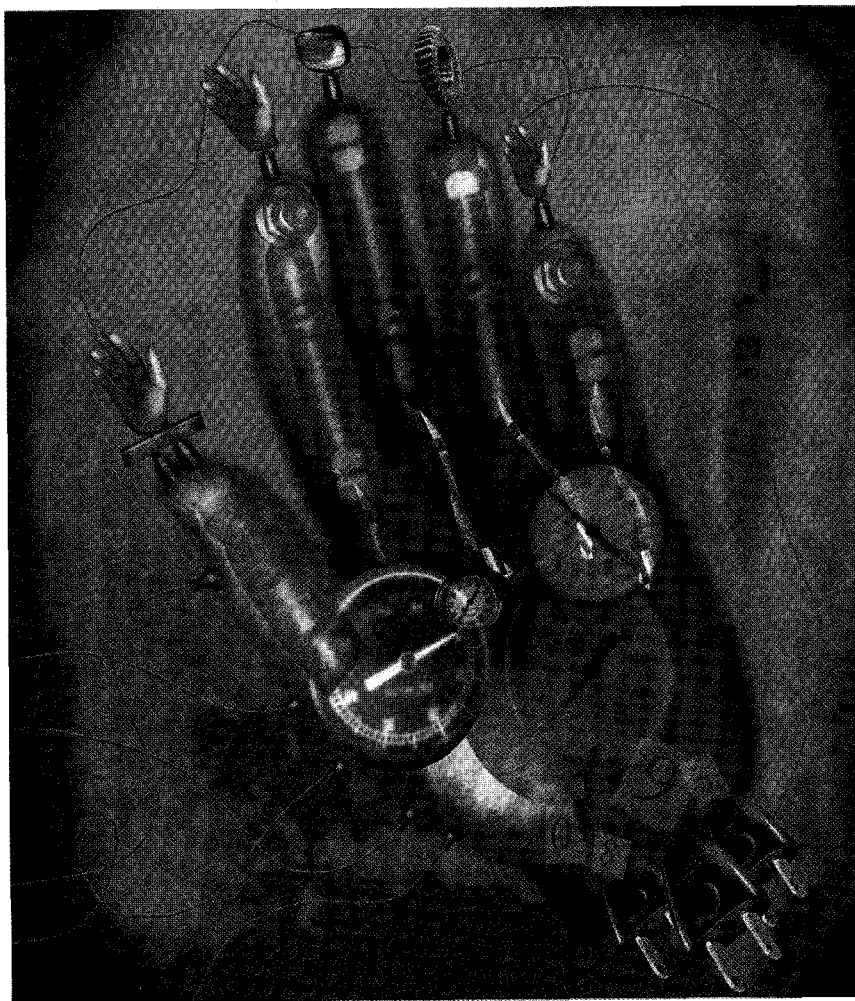
It is a matter of history, of course, that someone in the last century discovered that whisky ages best in oaken casks which have previously contained sherry (and that today The Macallan is the last malt whisky exclusively to be so matured).

And it is a matter of fact that in goes the translucent stripling spirit. And out comes amber-gold nectar positively billowing with flavour.

But let us take our cue from a party of scientists whom we once invited to explore the matter. ‘Magic!’ they exclaimed, swigging their drams in a most unboffinly manner. ‘But magic is merely undiscovered science and we’d like to take some home for further investigation.’

THE MACALLAN. THE SINGLE MALT SCOTCH.

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The Computer and the Economy

Will information technology ever produce the productivity gains that were predicted?

THE arrival of the new, computerized economy is regularly heralded—one might even say hyped—in the business press. Evidence for “productivity miracles” arising from the computer and from information technology (IT) in general appears to be all around us. Modern steel mills run

by **Alan S. Blinder and Richard E. Quandt**

virtually without labor. The New York Stock Exchange handles electronically a volume of transactions that was inconceivable in the pre-computer age. Businesses nowadays can compute and communicate far faster than they could, say, a decade or two ago. The improvements have indeed been prodigious.

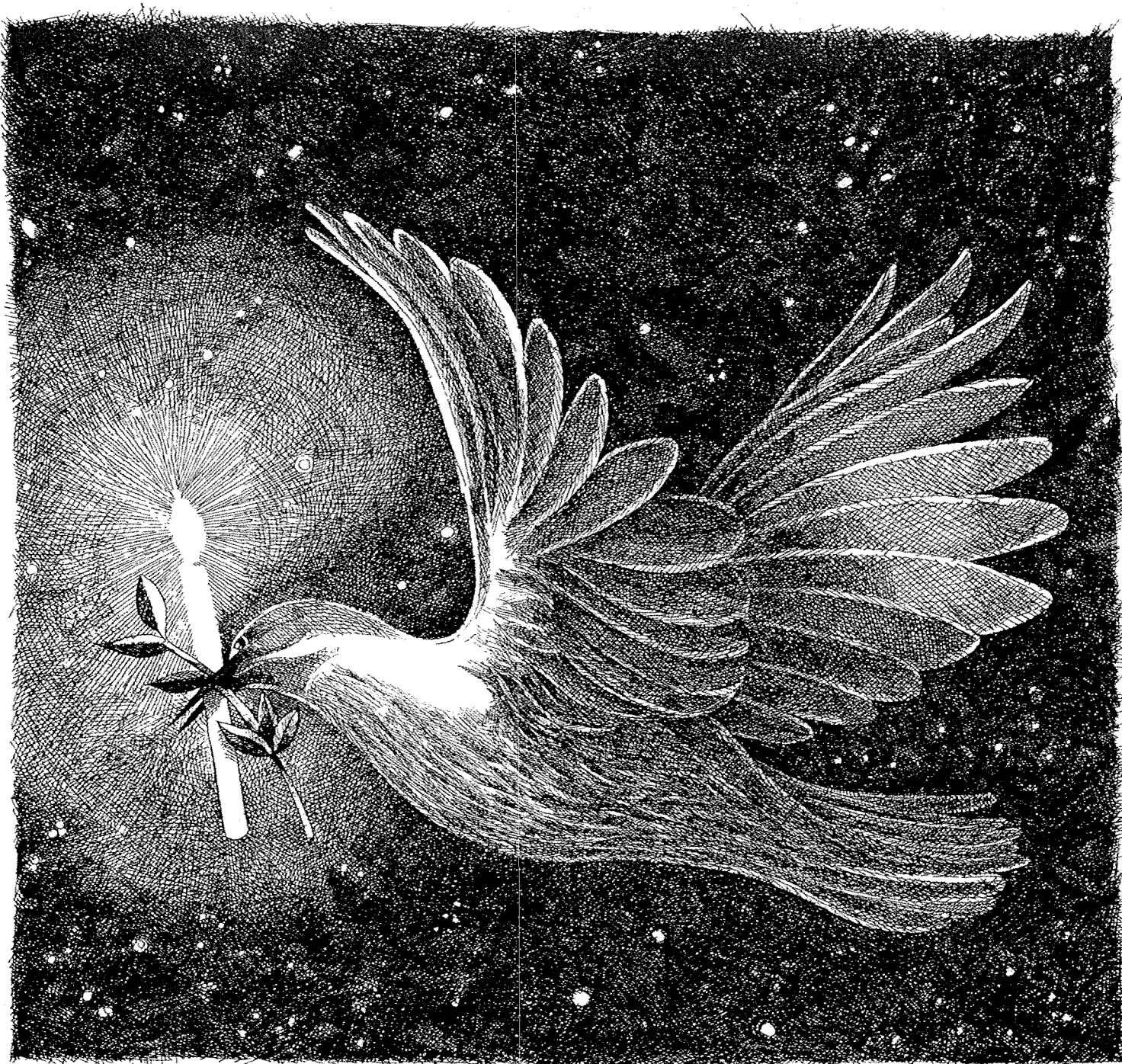
For example, if over the past thirty years or so automobile efficiency had increased as dramatically as computer efficiency has in some respects, you would now be able to drive your car coast to coast on about four milliliters of gasoline.

Computerization has also revolutionized (some) factory floors and the inventory-management practices of numerous companies. Some businesses now serve their customers with automated devices rather than human beings—ATMs, voice mail, and Web sites are common examples. And, of course, many new products and some entirely new industries (for example, Internet access) have been created.

But is it a vastly more *productive* world—in the narrow sense of producing more gross domestic product per hour of labor? The official data say no. As the government measures it, productivity growth has not accelerated since the information revolution got going. In fact, except in manufacturing, it has decelerated. And productivity performance has been downright dreadful in some of the areas in which innovations in IT might have been expected to yield the most dramatic dividends—such as the financial sector. What’s going on here? How can we reconcile the dismal productivity numbers with the apparently wondrous developments in IT?

Our hypothesis is that both adjectives are wrong: productivity performance is not quite so dismal as the official numbers suggest, and developments in IT are not quite so wondrous.

To be sure, part of the problem is that we are mismeasuring productivity. A corollary of the well-known argument that standard price indexes overstate inflation is that standard quantity measures—real GDP, for example—understate production. Since labor input is measured accurately, any underestimate of output translates directly into an underestimate of labor productivity (output per hour). The data insist that the U.S. economy has experienced essentially no increase in total-factor productivity (the ratio of output to *all* inputs, not just labor) for fifteen to twenty years. That is simply not believable. Furthermore, the fact that productivity performance has been particularly dismal in information-



Every year at about this time, the world lights a candle to Peace. It is a universal gesture, immune to politics. It pays tribute to no narrow philosophy, materialistic or messianic. The candle when lit by men of good will serves the good that is in us all; it cauterizes all that in us is evil.

To every force arrayed in anger against an opposing force in the world, the candle's message is simple:

"The sum of the good you share

in your hearts is far greater than those evils that seek to divide you."

The candle, when ignited, does not detonate. It illuminates. It doesn't challenge the heavens in a thundering roar. It makes its plea in a steady flame, reflected in the eye of a wondering child, or the squint of an elder who has seen it all.

The candle graces the menorah as it fits the tree. It is at home in all the windows of the world. Its reassurance cannot be measured.

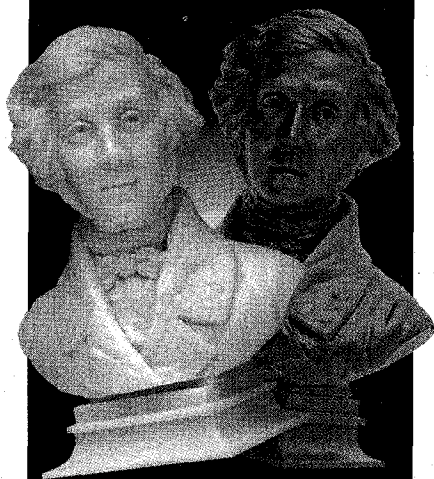
For, the good news is that Peace is not to be found in the frantic mathematics of the megaton.

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intensive industries where output is hard to measure hints at measurement error.

Although mismeasurement is surely part of the story, it is not our main concern here. The claim that the IT revolution has boosted productivity enormously is, we believe, based on misunderstanding, hype, and an untested prediction about the future rather than a factual statement about the past. Here are ten reasons for questioning the productivity bounty from IT.

1. *It's less than you think.* Fascinating as they are, computers and information technology are but a small piece of our vast economy. True, investment in computing and related equipment is the fastest-growing segment of business fixed investment. But last year it still accounted for less than 10 percent of gross investment. This may be the information age, but American industry still needs factories and office buildings, trucks and airplanes, drill presses and stamping machines, and a myriad of other old-fashioned—and expensive—investment items. Much of the industrial world is still physical, not virtual.

It is hard to see how a mere 10 percent of investment could revolutionize economy-wide productivity—although it could well have dramatic effects in some sectors. Indeed, Daniel Sichel, an economist at the Federal Reserve, estimates that investment in computer hardware accounted for only 0.2 of the total 2.3 percent average annual growth rate of nonfarm business output from 1980 to 1992, and even less in the preceding years.

Furthermore, as is well known, computer technology grows obsolete with amazing celerity (more on this later), so the share of IT in net investment—that is, after depreciation—is even less than its share in gross investment. And, of course, it is net investment that augments the stock of productive capital. In this respect the new world of information technology is a lot like Alice's Wonderland: you have to run pretty fast just to stand still.

Finally, as every boat owner knows, equipping a boat with an engine that is twice as powerful as the original one will not make the boat go twice as fast. In fact, if the engine tries to force the boat to go faster than its "hull speed," the craft may lower its nose and drive itself underwater. Similarly, it is fallacious to think that if the efficiency of comput-

ers doubles (or rises a thousandfold), the whole set of industrial inputs should therefore become twice as efficient.

2. *It's not as new as you think.* The Internet, satellite communications, and cellular telephones are technological marvels that have not only speeded up communications but also made possible entirely new forms of information transfer. But they hardly constitute the first steps in this direction, nor are they necessarily the biggest. The invention of the telegraph, in the middle of the nineteenth century, allowed messages from New York to Chicago to be delivered more than 3,000 times as fast as before. The laying of the transatlantic cable in 1866 created a like improvement in communication speed between New York and London. And who really thinks that any of the flashy modern innovations in communications approaches the productivity impact of the telephone?

Nor did office and factory automation wait for the computer age. The typewriter had already improved so much by 1900 that typing was three times as fast as handwriting. Adding machines became available in the 1880s, as did Herman Hollerith's original punch-card machine. Henry Ford's innovative assembly lines represented a quantum leap in productivity—but they were not driven by a computer.

Our point is not to denigrate recent

Many of the innovations contributing the most to industrial productivity came long ago.

technological achievements. They are stupendous. But as these inventions dazzle us, it is easy to forget that many of the innovations that have contributed the most to industrial productivity came long ago.

Our next four points pertain to the growing pains that are experienced when technology advances faster than our capacity to absorb it—as information technology surely has.

3. *We are always in the learning mode.*

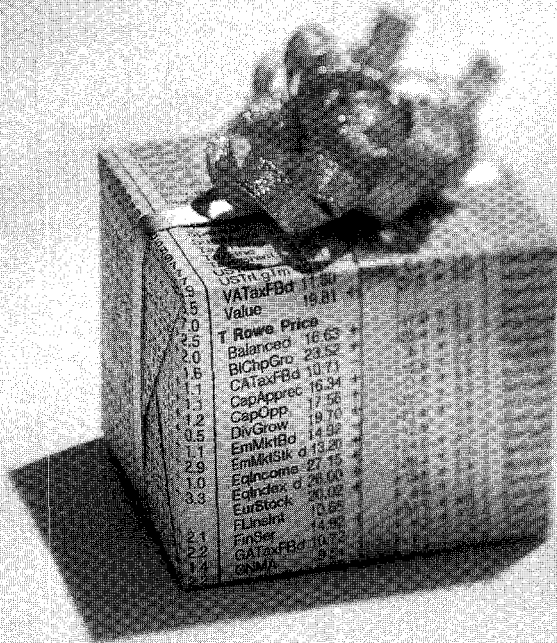
New products appear constantly. We are often enchanted by the possibilities they offer but unable to exploit them without investing considerable time and effort in learning. When IBM mainframes were the dominant kind of computer, all you had to learn was the operating system JCL and your favorite applications software, and you were set. Now there are hundreds or even thousands of hardware providers, and probably hundreds of thousands of software providers—each with different approaches and protocols.

Standardization has gone out the window. Installing a software package on one computer is not necessarily the same as installing it on another. Installing it in the presence of some other kind of software is not the same as installing it without that software. Device-driver conflicts are legion. Sometimes even the vendor's technical-support people have a hard time accomplishing the customer's objectives. All this consumes endless amounts of time and resources, thereby diminishing productivity.

4. *Obsolescence occurs quickly.* No sooner have you gotten used to WordPerfect 5.0, with a manual of about 500 pages, than WordPerfect 5.1 appears—with a manual of about 1,000 pages. No sooner are you on speaking terms with that than WordPerfect 6.0 appears, and so on. Unlike much industrial equipment, software is easily rendered obsolete. And since software products are not perishable, the only way a software provider can grow significantly is by regularly inducing customers to buy updates. This turnover adds to the learning problems mentioned above, often without much noticeable improvement in the product—except, perhaps, for the elimination of bugs in the previous version, which are duly replaced by different bugs in the new version.

5. *Fragmentation and lack of quality control.* Flowers in the software industry have bloomed prolifically. Once upon a time there were a few large vendors; now thousands and thousands of small vendors are in business. Imagination and initiative have soared in consequence. But quality may have been compromised—not necessarily by neglect but perhaps because matters have become too complex for anyone to fathom fully. Thus, for example, one high-level computer language works

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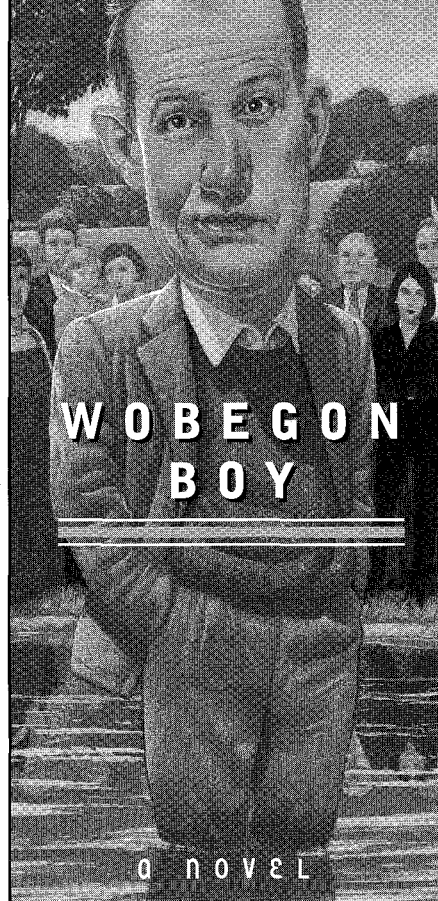


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with DOS and Windows but not with Windows95. A certain well-known Fortran compiler for Windows95 works flawlessly—but if you try to execute a program it has compiled, it will tell you that it may not execute correctly in DOS mode and will ask whether you want it to produce a proper DOS version. If you reply no and execute anyway, it works; if you say yes, it bombs. And it would be interesting to know how many person-hours and billions of dollars will have been spent by December 31, 1999, on fixing the "year 2000 problem" that affects a vast number of computer programs.

6. *Interdependence can be hazardous.* Not long ago most of us worked on free-standing computers; now virtually everything is networked. This development has been mostly to the good. It has paved the way, for example, for enormous advances in information transfer and processing. But being linked to seemingly everyone by far fewer than six degrees of separation has its dark side.

A decade ago a clever hacker prepared a computer "worm" in the form of a Christmas greeting, which he sent by E-mail over IBM's worldwide message network. Recipients, upon opening the mail, would see a cute little Christmas tree displayed on the screen. Unbeknownst to them, however, the E-mail also interrogated their E-mail address books. It then duplicated itself the requisite number of times and sent itself to each address. At these new destinations it repeated the process. Within a few hours the network was so badly overloaded that it was almost brought to a halt.

Three additional reasons pertain to economists' bread-and-butter concern: the efficient use of resources.

7. *Inappropriate pricing.* Information is valuable; thus it makes sense for the creators of databases and the providers of access to databases to charge for their use. But the marginal cost of providing access to a database is very close to zero; hence the socially optimal price charged for such access should also be very close to zero. But at such a low price the initial investment cannot be recouped; even operating costs may not be recoverable. Hence database access is typically sold at prices higher than marginal cost, which introduces monopoly elements into the industry and makes the use of information resources less intensive than

it would be under competitive pricing.

In the case of the Internet, even getting an effective pricing system up and running has proved daunting. But here an opposite problem has arisen: the price charged for Internet access is often zero, so the resource is grotesquely overused. The result is that congestion on the information superhighway at rush hours rivals congestion on conventional high-

*Growing pains are
experienced when
technology advances
faster than
we can absorb it.*

ways. If things don't improve, Yogi Berra's aphorism may soon apply: The place is so crowded that nobody goes there any more.

8. *Games people play.* Many of the resources made available by information technology provide amusement but have no visible impact on productivity. In fact, some of the fun may come at the expense of productivity. Aimless surfing of the Internet, social exchange over chat lines, membership in endless listservs, and computer games are all fun, but they probably reduce rather than enhance business productivity. And we have not even mentioned junk E-mail.

9. *Information overload.* Improvements in information technology are, of course, designed to get more and more information to more and more people more and more rapidly. To a truly remarkable extent the information revolution has achieved this goal—and progress continues unabated. Now ask yourself a question: How often do you feel that the sheer quantity—not the quality, mind you, but the quantity—of information reaching you is insufficient?

Speaking for ourselves, we receive by conventional (paper) means alone far more information than we can possibly process. Often electronic transmissions just add to the glut. Computers may work a million times as fast as they did a (human) generation ago, but the infor-

mation-processing capabilities of the human brain have undergone no such technological revolution. In truth, most people now spend a significant amount of time just sifting through the information that bombards them each day.

Search engines are an apt modern metaphor for the information-overload problem. How many times have you searched for a combination of words, only to be told that your machine has found 19,468 matches for you to inspect?

Finally, we return to the point made earlier about the likely mismeasurement of productivity. In the case of IT this point needs at least one major qualification.

10. *Yes, it's unmeasured, but is it productivity?* We grant that the government's data-collection systems are probably too antiquated to capture many of the gains derived from IT. People are better off for being able to bank after hours at an ATM, or to obtain travel information after midnight on the Internet. Stock markets handle with ease far more transactions than they once did. Researchers, lawyers, journalists, and others can now search enormous archives and files of newspapers

and magazines quickly and efficiently. The list could go on and on. Such gains are real, though some go unmeasured.

But in other cases "productivity gains" are ephemeral or even chimerical. Our own industry—college teaching—offers many such examples. Since students started to submit term papers written with word processors, the appearance of the papers has greatly improved. Lines of text are justified, spell-checkers catch most spelling errors, footnotes fit neatly on the page, and so on. But the thinking has not improved, and the quality of the research has sometimes deteriorated. For example, we know of one college that now requires that term papers contain references to at least some books available in the college library, because students find it so easy to track down facts on the Internet that term papers have increasingly relied exclusively on Internet references. And casual empiricism suggests that both grammar and spelling in E-mail are atrocious.

Easy access to computers and computer power may have adverse effects even on the work of otherwise careful

and thoughtful researchers. Computer programs designed to solve scientific problems normally have to be debugged first—that is, put through a wringer to discover inadvertent logical errors. In the old days, when researchers used to get only small slices of computer time at sporadic intervals (often late at night), they thought very hard about how to fix their programs—lest the debugging task take weeks. Nowadays hundreds of passes can be made in a day, and as a result computer users may well substitute computer power for brainpower. It is most unlikely that gains in research productivity—measured in, say, problems solved per day—have come even close to those in computing technology.

IF it is true, as we believe, that advances in IT have yielded only small gains in productivity up to now, will the future be like the past? Or are we about to enter a new realm of IT-generated productivity?

One school of thought holds that the growing pains we have just discussed will soon give way to enormous gains in

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AMERICA IN THE FIFTIES

Ike, the Mouseketeers and *Father Knows Best*. Heady optimism and wholesome values permeated America in the 1950s. But so did latent fear and palpable disquietude. Tension—between innocence and menace, optimism and fear—characterized the decade:

- Post-war Baby Boom coexisted with anti-Red hysteria
- Television brought Ed Sullivan into the living room and slick new campaign techniques to Richard Nixon
- Idolatry of Marilyn Monroe fed a feminist backlash led by Betty Friedan
- Exodus to the suburbs got underway as Rosa Parks defied segregation on city buses

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productivity as the transition to the information age is completed and new technologies diffuse throughout society. According to this view, we have so far seen only the least-productive tip of the iceberg. The best is yet to come.

Many traditional service jobs will disappear, but new ones will be created. We may have fewer bookkeepers but more data-entry clerks. We will have much less reason to leave our homes for shopping, learning, and discussions with friends and colleagues. There will be profound long-term effects on the publishing industry as we know it. And the quality of education at all levels might be expected to improve. There will be obvious and beneficial impacts on the computing and telecommunications industries.

Many other marvels may be in store for us. For example, the coming decades may see a great deal of consolidation and standardization in IT, which will continue to reduce the costs of using it. A group of professionals, perhaps called "customizing specialists," will probably come into being to solve some of the problems we noted earlier. Furthermore, much of the power of IT may be seen in pure research, whose effects on productivity are extremely long-term.

This optimistic view may well be accurate. But even if it is, our highly productive future may be a long way off. In the meantime, we may be condemned to a lengthy and uncomfortable transition period. Indeed, if technology continues to evolve as quickly in the future as it has in, say, the past three decades (and who is to say it will not?), our human adaptive capabilities may lag further and further behind the new machines.

And, again, there is the nasty problem of information overload. We must entertain the possibility that many people and businesses have already passed the point of positive net returns to information—net, that is, after processing costs. How many of us really think that our business or professional lives are seriously impeded by a lack of information? More and more information may simply make us less and less able to digest and process the information that is readily at hand.

Ironically, the most profound benefits of information technology may be found not in the economic arena at all but in the political sphere. We have already seen, in

the former Soviet Union and its satellites, the salutary effects of a free flow of information on repressive, authoritarian regimes. Such systems can survive only if small groups of people prevent others from understanding and sharing in the decision-making that affects their lives. The channels of control required to maintain an authoritarian system are vertical. Someone at the top decides what should happen, and this information or decision is passed down a chain that eventually reaches the citizens affected. Horizontal cooperation among citizens—a hallmark of civil society and hence of democracy—must be discouraged, as it effectively was in the Soviet bloc.

Although information technology can be used for purposes antagonistic to democracy, such as snooping and surveillance, we believe that it is on the whole clearly the enemy of authoritarian systems. The ease with which individuals can browse in publicly accessible information sources, exchange private messages, or log into remote computers makes the flow of information unhindered, free, and vast. When schoolchildren in one country can routinely chat on the Internet with their counterparts in another, when newsletters are posted on listservs, official falsehoods will not long prevail.

This important point has been perceived by the philanthropist George

*How many of us
really think that our
lives are seriously
impeded by a lack of
information?*

Soros. One objective of his support of worthy causes in Central and Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union is to spread the use and culture of the Internet, because information technology promotes the growth of open societies. In the end, the primary payoff from advances in information technology may be not in new and better goods and services but in new and better democracies. ☼

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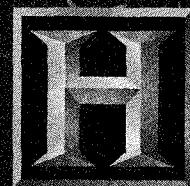
television set! Well, whatever "The Big One" was, you just hoped it would come soon.

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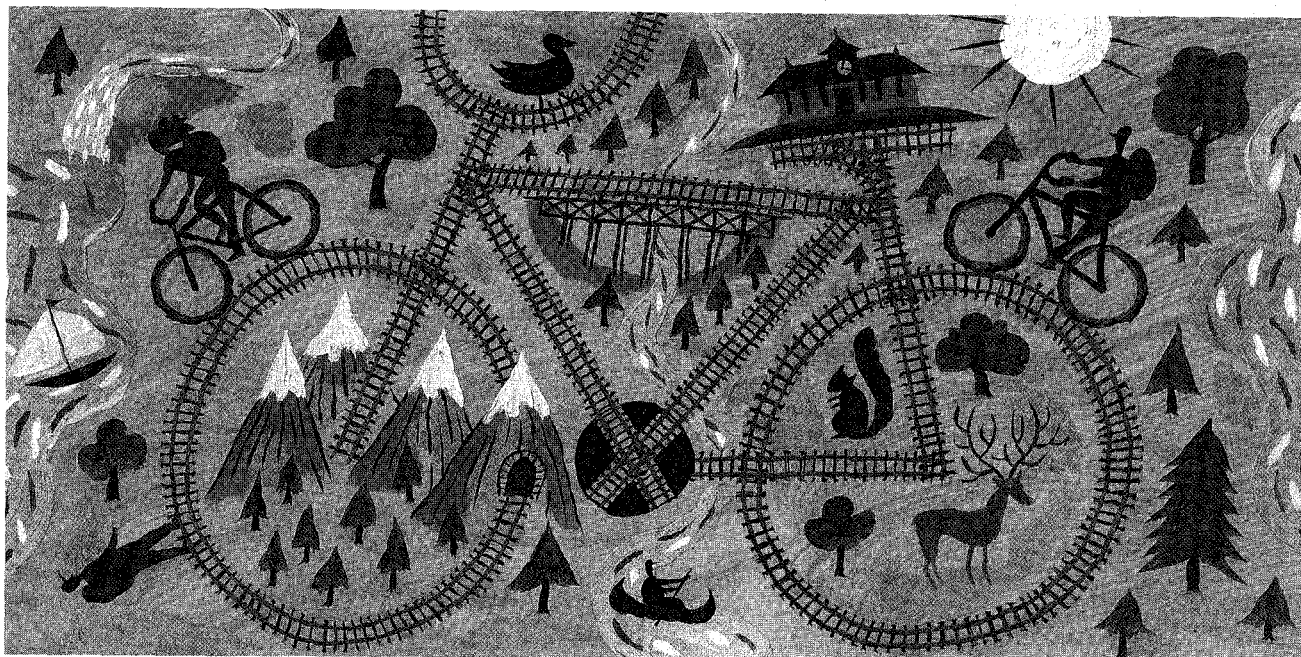
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Rails to Trails

*Across America disused railbeds
are being converted to trails for hiking and
biking. Soon a national trail
will link the coasts*

ASPECTACULAR outdoor-recreation experience has only just become available. It occurs near the end of a short bicycle ride along the Cowboy Trail, a new and very long biking, hiking, and horseback-riding trail that is still taking shape across almost the whole of Nebraska. The most exhilarating moments begin abruptly, without warning, a couple of miles south of the feedlots and corrals at the east end of Valentine—a small ranching town that sits near the northern edge of the vast, grass-covered, almost uninhabited Nebraska Sand Hills.

Pedaling southeast from Valentine on the Cowboy Trail last summer on a borrowed bike, the wind at my back, I was pretty much ignoring the scenery and concentrating on building up speed, because the path ahead was magnificently smooth, straight, level, and empty. The Sand Hills

cover 19,300 square miles and are the largest complex of sand dunes in the Western Hemisphere; parts of them look at first like the Golf Course That Swallowed the Universe. From one windswept horizon to another the view is of rounded green hilltops, treeless and cow-cropped, separated by sandy gullies and small lakes.

Suddenly the ground on either side of the trail fell away steeply and changed character, sprouting tall trees. I caught a quick glimpse of winding blue water. But the real marvel wasn't just the unexpected difference in my surroundings; there was also an unexpected sameness in my circumstances. I was still furiously moving straight ahead and at the exact same level. It was as though the bike path had extended directly across the middle of the sky. Twenty feet to my right a turkey vul-

ture—similar to ones I had seen five minutes earlier soaring hundreds of feet overhead in high, lazy circles—appeared out of nowhere and coasted along beside me, at my speed and height. I stopped pedaling and risked a closer look. The bird was gliding on thermals rising from the wide river valley that had opened up beneath us. But what was holding me aloft?

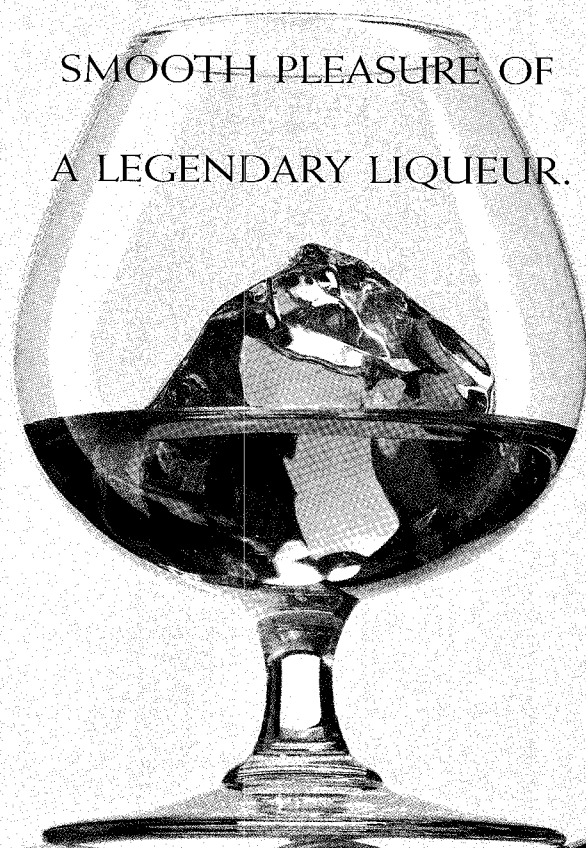
I was cupped by an extraordinary wooden cradle. It had a solid plank floor about ten feet wide, a five-foot-high wooden railing on either side, no roof, and, from my vantage point, no visible means of support. Rather than stop to figure it all out, I wanted to keep pace with that buzzard. It was much cooler out here in the middle of the air than it had been back in the Sand Hills. The only sounds I could hear were a rush of air and a *shuss* of tires on wood. And from somewhere I could catch a faint scent of sun-warmed grass. I swept forward, alert, weightless.

A couple of minutes later I saw ground up close on either side of me once again. The vulture had veered off. I was across the valley, and could brake to a stop and think about things such as the physics of the trip. Walking back to the end of the wooden cradle, I peered over one edge. Slender iron legs, carefully riveted together, crisscrossed the valley to support the level iron platform of what had once been a single-track railway bridge across the Niobrara River. I later found

by **Tony Hiss**

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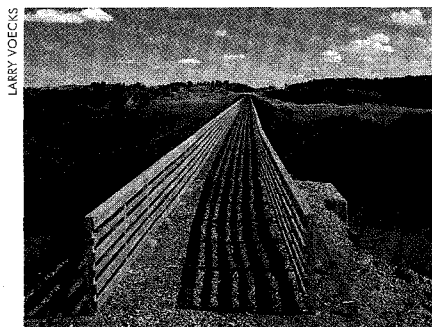
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out just how big it is—a quarter of a mile long and almost 150 feet high. The entire Cowboy Trail was until recently a railroad, the 321-mile Cowboy Line of the old Chicago and North Western system.

When it's fully open, the Cowboy Trail will be the longest railroad-based trail in the country—and will also constitute about 11 percent of what is expected to become over the next decade a coast-to-coast trail corridor, the spine of an interconnected network of similar pathways. I'd gone to Nebraska to see firsthand the coming of age of "rails to trails," as it is called, a citizen-based recycling campaign to convert cast-off rail corridors into public trails for a variety of uses, including biking, hiking, horseback riding, and Rollerblading.

How many uses any trail can sustain depends on what kind of treatment the roadbed gets: mountain bikes, horses, and some hikers can handle minimally improved trails (now about a fifth of the total) from which old rails and ties have been removed. About half of existing rail trails have been given improved surfaces, such as crushed stone and gravel, and family outings on bicycles are much better on these. The interstate highways of the movement—the one third of rail trails that have been paved with asphalt or concrete—welcome all comers.

A DOZEN years ago, after more than two decades of local efforts, there were perhaps 600 miles of rail trails in the country, and in the words of a leading national-land conservationist, William H.



The Cowboy Trail crossing the Niobrara River in Nebraska

Whyte, it took "a real hardcore screwball" to tackle such a project. Today there are 10,000 miles of publicly owned and fully open rail trails through cities, suburbs, farm belts, and wild lands, and another 18,000 miles being readied for use. The

Rails-to-Trails Conservancy, a national nonprofit group, now has 75,000 members and in a dozen years has grown from a staff of one to a staff of forty-five. Rail trails, according to Martin J. Rosen, the president of the Trust for Public Land, have become "one of the most rapidly accelerating land-acquisition movements in American history." Much of this acceleration has a predictable explanation: it's the result of skillful organization by activists who are good at pouncing on changes in the national laws and the flow of federal money. In 1983 Congress passed what could be called the Humpty Dumpty Wellness Act—a one-paragraph provision in the national trails law that established the concept of "railbanking," which keeps intact rights-of-way for railroads that have gone out of service but that may someday again carry people or freight.

Thus trails, which had previously been seen as irrelevant to railroad policymaking, were accorded a legitimate, in-the-meantime recreational use justified by future transportation necessity. Without railbanking, abandoned rail corridors would have disappeared overnight as legal entities and could have broken into hundreds of scraps, impossible to reassemble. American law is muddled and muddled when it comes to railroad-corridor ownership, and once trains stop running, it's often unclear whether the land is still a railroad's or reverts to its "adjacents," the property owners along a line. (Out west the adjacent in many places is the federal government, setting up the possibility of very long, skinny national parks between forests and wilderness preserves.)

The railbanking law gave rail-trail activists standing; ISTEA (pronounced *ice tea*), the 1991 Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act, awarded them funding. ISTEA is the first national attempt since the Second World War to pull the country together without just building longer and wider highways.

The 1991 law is meant to start healing what roads and sprawl have done to American communities and the landscapes around them. ISTEA gives only the slightest nudge to postwar spending patterns, shifting three quarters of one percent of federal transportation disbursements into programs that make it easier to bike and walk through our towns and countryside. But so vast are

the totals spent every year that 0.75 percent represents \$820 million for bicycle and pedestrian facilities since 1992, more than twenty times the amount spent during the two decades before ISTEA became law. (ISTEA is now up for reauthorization, and leaders in both the House and the Senate are promising next spring to carry forward the ISTEA approach to biking and walking.)

And there is certainly plenty of raw material for rail-trail advocates to work with. American railroad mileage, which peaked at 254,000 miles in 1916, has been declining ever since the 1920s, when Congress made it national policy to build highways between all the county seats across the country. That decline accelerated dramatically in the 1970s, after a number of big, or Class I, eastern railroads went bankrupt, and it continues today, as the remaining large railroads scramble to survive by merging into pared-down megasystems.

Frank Wilner, the author of *Railroad Mergers: History, Analysis, Insight*, thinks that Class I mileage, which diminished from 192,000 miles in 1975 to 108,000 miles in 1995, may stabilize twenty years from now at no more than 70,000 or 75,000 miles. At that point, Wilner suggests, there will be only one or two supersized railroads left, running coast to coast, and possibly through Canada and Mexico as well. Hundreds of short lines—new, smaller railroads that are more attuned to the needs of local customers—might pick up close to half of the leftover rail corridors, and some of the rest might be acquired by tourist railroads and mass-transit lines. Rail trails, if they can keep up the pace of the past ten years, may wind up with more than a quarter of the remainder.

But what would happen to the rest of those early-twenty-first-century cast-offs—11,000 or so miles of rail corridors? During my Nebraska trip, and on a recent, equally memorable helicopter flight over northeastern Connecticut, I began to think of the permanent loss of any mile of rail line as an enormous waste of creative brilliance. The rapid success of rail trails has in large part to do with what people in the nineteenth century called "the poetry of engineering"—a superb if literally unsung aspect of our national railroading inheritance.

Thanks to the lasting impact that rail-

(Continued on page 44)

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Dance and Theater

BY NANCY DALVA AND JOHN ISEL

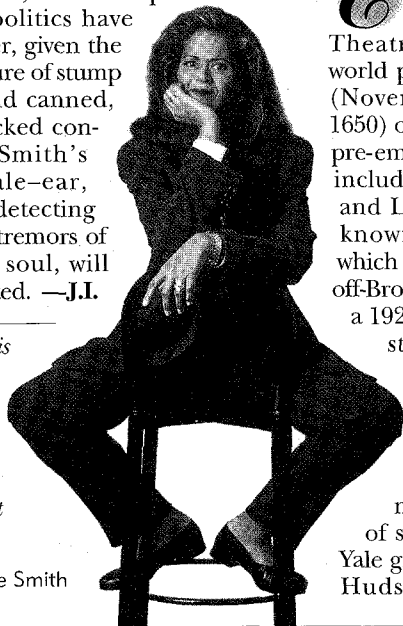
IN THEIR OWN WORDS

Anna Deavere Smith is a modern Tocqueville on tour through the American psyche armed with a tape recorder. She interviews dozens, sometimes hundreds, of participants in a variety of events, and then performs them onstage. Smith first garnered national attention with *Fires in the Mirror: Crown Heights, Brooklyn, and Other Identities* (produced at New York's Public Theatre and later filmed for PBS) and *Twilight: Los Angeles, 1992*, which briefly ran on Broadway. Both one-person shows, they relied solely on Smith's uncanny ability to "repeat" the interviewees' own words (she won't say "act"), to portray everyone from Lubavitcher housewives to the Reverend Al Sharpton, from Senator Bill Bradley to Rodney King's aunt. Her answer to the riots that affected these people is a mythic, virtuosic act of performance as mediation.

Smith's latest play, *House Arrest: First Edition*, takes the Stanford professor and part-time film actor (*The American President*, *Philadelphia*) from the incendiary to what most consider the insipid: the press and politics. Smith spent 1996 interviewing participants in the presidential campaign—from convention delegates to the Commander-in-Chief. Through January 4 a large cast, directed by Mark Rucker, portrays several dozen of her subjects on the Arena Stage, in Washington, D.C. (202-488-3300). This latest installment in her project "On the Road: A Search for American Character," begun in 1983, raises the question Does American politics have any character, given the wooden nature of stump speeches and canned, vacuum-packed conventions? Smith's Richter scale—ear, capable of detecting the faintest tremors of the human soul, will surely be tested. —J.I.

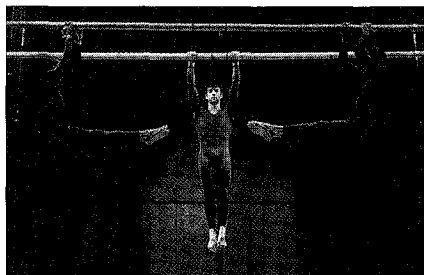
Nancy Dalva is the author of *Dance Ink: The Photographs*. John Isel is a senior editor at *Stagebill*.

Anna Deavere Smith



A SUGARPLUM-FREE HOLIDAY TREAT

At first glance the decorum and décor of the traditional Christmas chestnut *The Nutcracker* and the vivid activity that Elizabeth Streb—the recent winner of a MacArthur "genius" award—calls "pop action" don't



Streb/Ringside performs *Up*

have much in common. But glance again and you see two family entertainments full of interesting embedded morals that can occupy the adult mind most pleasantly, and perhaps seep into the child's. (If you want to tell the kids right up front that Streb adores math, and that her work puts geometry into motion, go ahead. If not, you can bring it up later at homework time.) Streb's thrilling troupe Ringside has no party dresses or toy soldiers with swords; everyone wears a unitard, and males and females leap and leap alike; all the raz-

zle-dazzle is for real. Children see *Up* and love it: all the interaction is in the air, the six performers bounding and rebounding, zinging among two tall towers, a set of high-wire parallel bars, an Olympic-quality "hot bed" trampoline, and the nearly bare ground, where their plummeting dives are cushioned by some improbably ordinary foam mats. In her question-and-answer sessions with her audiences (part of every performance, and wonderfully entertaining), Streb lets kids know that these moves are not something they should try at home and that the work—just like a trapeze act—is rehearsed to a fine point, no false moves, all true, all timed. Children instinctively understand Streb's convergence of courage and fun. They don't trouble about the meaning—it simply finds them, just as it finds us. Streb gives us all the kinesthetic rapture of pure velocity in a gift wrapping both wondrous and familiar: people, unadorned, all presence and no pretense. That the work lends itself so readily to metaphor tells us much about plain speaking. *The Nutcracker* is all about the nineteenth century; Ringside is all about the twenty-first. (Joyce Theater, New York, December 16–January 4; for more information and tickets call 212-242-0800.) —N.D.

SPACE EXPLORATION REDEFINED

Expect a close encounter of the extra-theatrical kind when you visit Chicago's Steppenwolf Theatre Company this month. The world premiere of Tina Landau's *Space* (November 28–January 24; 312-335-1650) orbits the home stage of America's pre-eminent acting ensemble (members include Gary Sinise, John Malkovich, and Laurie Metcalf). Landau is best known for her directorial bravura, which she applied to the award-winning off-Broadway musical *Floyd Collins*, about a 1920s media frenzy caused by a man stuck in a Kentucky cave, and to *Time to Burn*, Charles Mee Jr.'s adaptation of Gorky's *The Lower Depths*, which she spectacularly spelunked for Steppenwolf last season. Although noted for her brilliant physical use of stage space, the thirtysomething Yale grad writes, too: everything from a Hudson River-side history play,

Stonewall: Night Variations, to a *Friday the 13th* sequel. On the surface *Space* revels in our fascination with alien abductions

and other assorted paranormal activity. The central character is a neuropsychiatrist set upon by patients whose similar tales of bee-eyed, Munchkin-sized visitors with a thing for strange surgical procedures soon suck him toward a big black hole of doubt. Ultimately Landau is more interested in existentials than extraterrestrials—and, of course, in redefining space—"whether it is the space of the universe, or the space of the mind, or the space of intimacy." Make "contact," *Space* suggests, and you won't feel so alienated from this world. —J.I.



Tina Landau

MICHAEL BROSILOW

STEPHEN M. RIVERS & ASSOC.

Popular Music and Jazz

BY BOB BLUMENTHAL AND CHARLES M. YOUNG

MADE IN THE MAPLESHADE

There can be no more unlikely setting for great jazz than the former tobacco plantation in Upper Marlboro, Maryland, where Pierre Sprey operates the Mapleshade label. Sprey, who possesses a highly refined idea of how recorded music should sound, works with a reel-to-reel recorder and avoids mixing boards, noise reduction, reverb, equalization, and overdubbing. He has produced more than fifty albums in the past decade—some of the best-sounding jazz and blues heard anywhere.

Mapleshade's motto, "music without compromise," has encompassed solo pianists, gospel choirs, big bands, and brass quintets, along with three diverse new releases. *Go-Go and Gumbo, Satchmo 'N Soul*, on the subsidiary label Wildchild, features A la Carte Brass & Percussion, a band whose sophisticated combination of New Orleans strut and Afro-Cuban

clave assimilates jazz, funk, and spirituals. Mark Taylor's *QuietLand* could pass for a chamber recital. Taylor plays French horn



boldly and lyrically; his uncommon jazz instrument gets support from stellar accompanists, including the pianist Myra Melford and the bassist

Fred Hopkins. Even the classical vocalist Karen Bourque-Simmons successfully ventures into improvisation.

Sprey relies heavily on musicians in charting Mapleshade's eclectic course. The World Saxophone Quartet's baritone-saxophone mainstay Hamiet Bluiett produces his own sub-series spotlighting neglected veterans, and features himself on *Makin' Whoopee*. Bluiett's brawny horn stands in for piano and vocals in a tribute to the King Cole Trio. The results are as mellow as they are unlikely, and could have been realized only by Mapleshade's Maryland maverick.

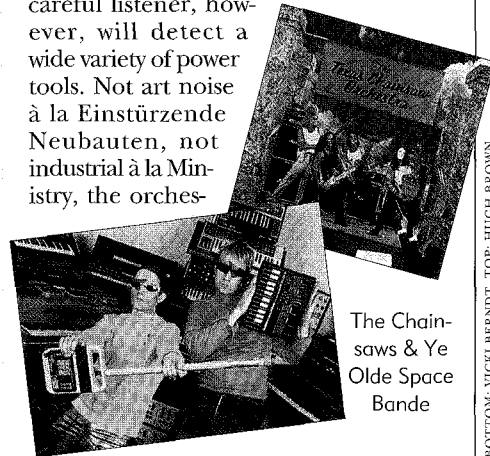
—B.B.



SAWS OR SYNTHESIZERS

"Rapier-like wit" is the accolade to which the parodist has traditionally aspired. That cliché may have to be amended with the debut of the Texas Chainsaw Orchestra, which doesn't so much poke fun at popular music as carve its limbs off, spraying blood and gristle and internal organs on the audience in the manner of the cult movie classic *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*.

The four anonymous band members wear the de rigueur hockey masks and appear to be playing chainsaws only (favoring Stihl and McCulloch models with 16" blades) in the cover art. The careful listener, however, will detect a wide variety of power tools. Not art noise à la Einstürzende Neubauten, not industrial à la Ministry, the orches-



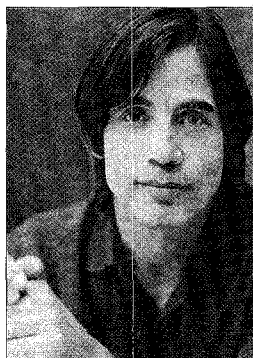
The Chain-saws & Ye Olde Space Bande

A PERFECT MIXTURE OF POETRY AND POLITICS

A pillar of Los Angeles rock since the early seventies, Jackson Browne started his career as almost the definition of the Baby Boom singer-songwriter. Handsome, a little frail, he developed a following primarily among educated females, who responded to his finely honed observations on romantic relationships. Introversion and a pensive (not cathartic) sadness informed his songs, which contrasted sharply with the severe judgments and not-so-veiled misogyny of some of his peers. Critics sometimes applied the dread adjective "mellow," but it didn't really apply.

Under his soothing voice he was asking you to think deeply about your life. In the late seventies he became more and more interested in radical politics, which has since come to inform his best songs—a rare and difficult transition. *The Next Voice You Hear: The Best of Jackson Browne* chronicles this career in a single CD, which is too short for his remarkable

body of work (when do we get the boxed set?), but it does make a powerful argument for Browne's continuing moral and artistic influence, not to mention his presence in your stereo. How many times has a great song been written about the evils of imperialism? Most rock stars don't even know what imperialism is, and those who do know tend to



Jackson Browne

get unbearably earnest and didactic. Browne has pulled off this difficult feat several times, most notably with "Lives in the Balance," which simultaneously reminds us of terrible crimes and makes us want to sing along.

—C.M.Y.

tra seeks only to hack up the classics. Khachaturian's "Sabre Dance," a warhorse in both classical music and progressive rock, gets an especially inspired disembowelment. Mostly, though, the orchestra eviscerates familiar tunes that have a tone of self-involved solemnity, like "American Woman" and "I Will Always Love You," so the listener can nod his head and think, "Yes, this song deserves it."

For even more vengeance on popular music, you might want to check out *The Moog Cookbook Plays the Classic Rock Hits* (Restless), by Ye Olde Space Bande, a duo that uses ancient synthesizers (the sort of stuff that stacks up in used-equipment stores and can't be given away) to send up classic-rock standards like "Whole Lotta Love" and "More Than a Feeling." Remember when *Switched on Bach* looked like the future? Well, this is that future, and it's both hilarious and oddly listenable.

—C.M.Y.

Bob Blumenthal is a jazz critic for The Boston Globe.

Charles M. Young reviews popular music for Playboy, Musician, and other publications.



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T H E R E ' S O N L Y O N E

Film

BY ELLA TAYLOR

SARAJEVO'S CHILDREN

There's a nervousness to *Welcome to Sarajevo*, a docudrama by British filmmaker Michael Winterbottom (*Jude*), as if the director feared losing his audience's attention if he failed to pile on the melodrama. Based on a book by the English foreign correspondent Michael Nicholson (played in the movie by Stephen Dillane), about his adoption of a young girl (Emira Nusevic) during the 1992 Serbian siege of Sarajevo, the movie mixes television war footage with a dramatization of the evacuation of a busload of orphaned children through Serbian lines to the West. In an unnec-



A reporter gets involved in the story

essary bid to pump up the movie's box-office appeal with big names, Winterbottom has cast Woody Harrelson and Marisa Tomei in incongruously minor roles as a flashy American foreign correspondent and a dedicated aid worker who shepherds the children's evacuation. The director's scathing indictment of the hands-off policy of Western politicians is well placed, but it also skirts some important questions about the difficulty of balancing humanitarian concerns with the larger game of politicking peace through diplomacy. The movie is strong on the way war collapses some social conventions (journalistic detachment, for instance) while raising others (the Miss Besieged Sarajevo beauty pageant) to the level of absurdist art. By rights this noble failure of a movie ought to be a straight documentary, but as a piece of impassioned agitprop, *Welcome to Sarajevo* can't fail to awaken its audience to the plight of parentless children caught in a viciously destructive war without winners.

Ella Taylor is a film critic for LA Weekly.

WHEN TO LEAD AND WHEN TO FOLLOW

For the British filmmaker Sally Potter (*Orlando*), politics go hand in hand with aesthetics. Her new movie, *The Tango Lesson*, is an autobiographical work about a filmmaker who takes tango lessons to distract herself from the unsatisfying screenplay she's trying to write. Sally (played by Potter herself) strikes a deal with her young teacher (Argentinian dancer and choreographer Pablo Verone)—if he makes a dancer of her, she will let him star in her next film. She becomes obsessed by the parallels between the tango, a dance that balances unity with struggle, and the power shifts that surge between her and the cocksure Pablo. Divided into numbered "lessons," the movie grows into a meditation on the professional and private identities of the artist. As a treatise



Pablo and Sally perfect their moves

on the politics of leading and following, *The Tango Lesson* is both over-intellectualized and obvious, weighed down by a portentous script and burdened with tributary themes that include Potter's excursions into her newly discovered Jewish identity and some obligatory digs at callow Hollywood executives who fail to comprehend her artistry. Potter is no actress: she wears a uniformly beatific smile that looks more than a little ragged by the end of the movie. No matter: even as a novice she dances like an angel, as does her ravishingly handsome partner. Gorgeously shot in black and white by the legendary cinematographer Robby Muller (*Breaking the Waves*), *The Tango Lesson* works magic as a stunningly erotic dance movie overlaid with a ruefully romantic love story.

THE HEART OF THE COMMUNITY

On the face of it there's little to connect the black humor and perverse sexuality of Canadian director Atom Egoyan's previous film, *Exotica*, with *The Sweet Hereafter*, his brooding adaptation of Russell Banks's novel about a small town pulverized by a terrible school bus accident. Like *Exotica*, though, Egoyan's new movie examines the distorted ways in which people try to give and receive love and cope with unspeakable loss. When an ambulance-chasing



Ian Holm and Sarah Polley

lawyer (Ian Holm) with a sad burden of his own arrives to whip up a bogus lawsuit by trading on the town's collective grief, he exposes the submerged weaknesses and deceptions that make up the secret life of any community. Bruce Greenwood and Sarah Polley are strong as a bereaved father and his babysitter who find ways to lead the town back to honesty, acceptance, and a kind of unity. The movie is graced by elliptical touches (a Pied Piper motif, a mournful score counterpointed by the false jollity of a

fairground) that pay respect to the novel's project—the mystery is not the accident but the range of human response to it—while imposing a cinematic tone and structure that lend clarity and urgency to Banks's spiritual inquiry and his alarm at the growing vulnerability of children. *The Sweet Hereafter* doesn't go down easy, but it feeds the soul.

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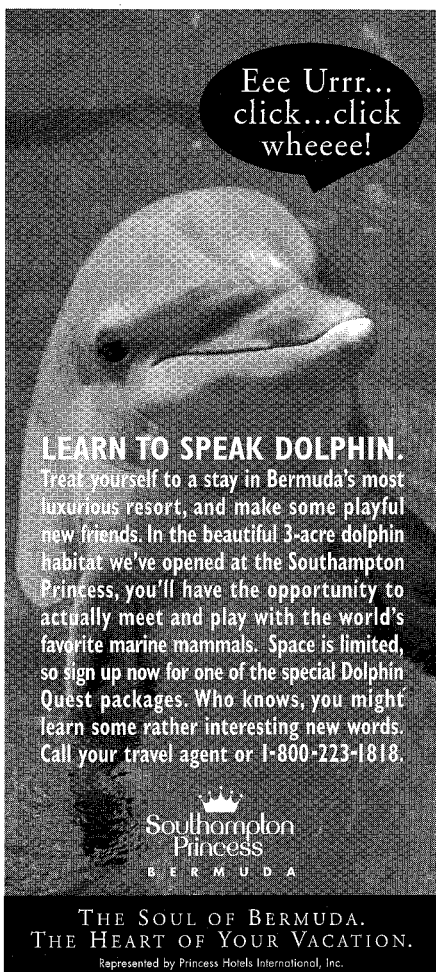
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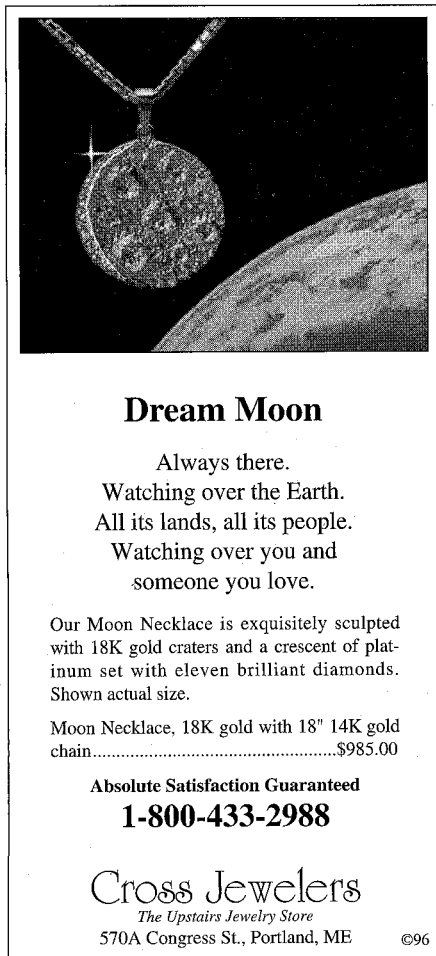
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(Continued from page 36)

ways have had on American life, we still teach children songs about glamorous express trains like the *Wabash Cannonball*, about the courageous engine-driving of Casey Jones, about the legendary rock-clearing and track-laying prowess of John Henry. But rail trails, partly because they are traversed so much more slowly than railroad tracks, are bringing us into direct, intimate contact with the accomplishments of "the other engineers," as they're sometimes called—the gifted railroad planners who, 170 years ago, began the routes that are now being abandoned. And they are linking us to the tens of thousands of railroad workers who, using only hand tools in the early years, actually did move mountains to make these rail lines real. (It has been estimated that each linear foot of hand-built rail line represents a full day's work by ten men.)

When I first heard about rail trails, they struck me as admirable mostly because they embodied thrift and making do; if people needed trails, here they were, pre-assembled and pre-engineered. Then I discovered the unusually good fit between the needs of locomotives and the needs of legs pumping bicycle pedals. Steam engines have enormous hauling power, but they don't corner well, and they tend to slide around on steel rails if a climb or a descent is too steep. So the inventors of railroad engineering in the 1830s and 1840s connected towns along lines that were as flat as possible and had wide, gentle curves. In general, rail-line grades are held to two percent: they rise (or fall) no more than two feet for every hundred feet they move ahead.

These kindly dimensions, instituted for completely different purposes, now create royal highways for hikers and bikers. But even the most noble path can be boring, as many of the 45,000 miles of the interstate highway system demonstrate. The true genius of these engineers, hidden until now, was that they, like Frederick Law Olmsted in the parks he designed a generation later, worked with landscapes to fashion experiences that strengthened people's connectedness to the land. The engineers were under strict orders from railroad owners and investors to hold costs down, so they kept the railbeds flat by working along river valleys as often as they could. But wherever possible they included gradually re-

vealed vistas, views that beckoned, and scenes of sudden wonder—such as the Nebraska bridge over the Niobrara.

Their work remained largely concealed because of the mechanics of a railroad ride. On most trains the only people who



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A Connecticut rail trail, part of the East Coast Greenway plan

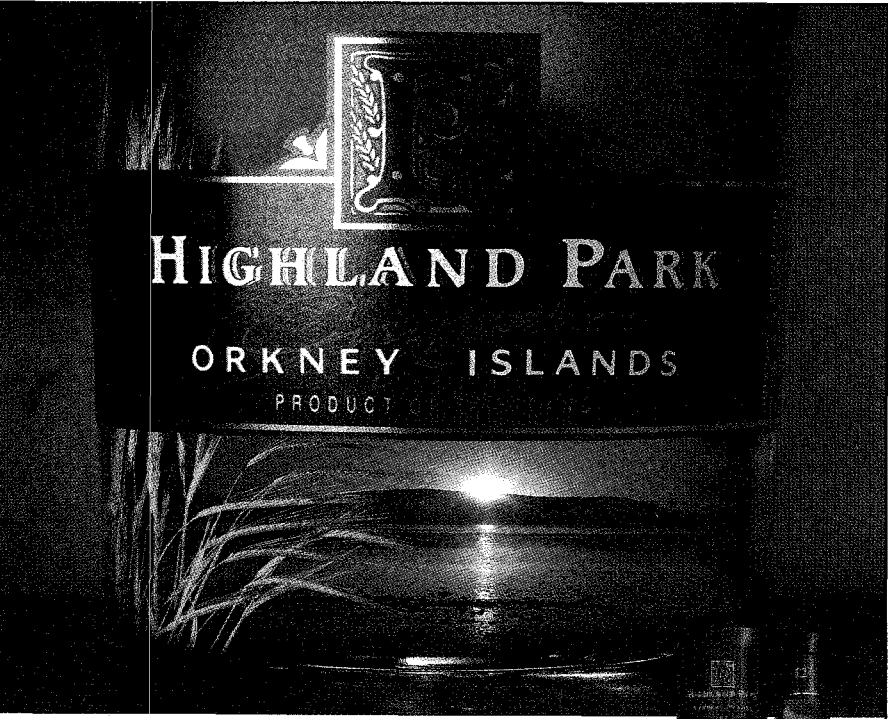
see what's up ahead along the track are the engineer and the fireman; everyone else, whether passenger or crew member, has to look either sideways or backward. (The much-loved postwar vista-dome cars, with their glass-bubble roofs, were an attempt to remedy this situation.) But a rail-trail hike or ride puts people back in touch with the views that inspired the planners of these lines—visionaries with dash, like so many of our early-nineteenth-century nation-builders. Among them were the Middlebury College professor Alexander Twining, educated at Yale and West Point, an astronomer, mathematician, and inventor, and an engineer as well; and Lieutenant George Washington Whistler, also from West Point, a Johnny Appleseed of railroad construction, who deserves to be as well known as his wife, the famous "Whistler's mother." Lieutenant Whistler, the father of the painter and etcher James Abbott McNeill Whistler, helped to lay out five American railways in the eastern United States. In 1842 he moved to Russia to oversee the construction of the 420-mile Moscow and St. Petersburg Railroad.

STRETCHING ISTEAFunding still further, Governor John Rowland, of Connecticut, in an unprecedented move two years ago asked engineers from his National Guard to clear and regrade for trail use more than fifty miles of abandoned railroads that run from near Hartford east to the Rhode Island state line. (The move has since inspired Governor Lincoln Almond, of Rhode Island; this

fall his National Guard began clearing out a rail-trail corridor almost thirty miles long that connects to the Connecticut trail and runs east to Providence.) The National Guard is constantly looking for what it calls "leave-behinds"—tangible results of training projects for its engineers which actually benefit communities; armies have traditionally been accused of simply digging holes and then filling them in again. Soccer fields are a favorite leave-behind—but a town can use only so many soccer fields, and the Connecticut Guard has eagerly embraced rail trails as an alternative.

Northeastern Connecticut, sometimes called the quiet corner of the state, is still astonishingly rural. The Guardsmen who took me up in the helicopter to fly over their handiwork told me that they had encountered wild turkeys and an albino deer along the trail. From the air I could see red barns, cows, white steeples, thousands upon thousands of acres of deep woodlands, and some early leave-behinds—mile after mile of stone walls in the middle of forests that back in the eighteenth century were cleared fields. And I saw the rail line that the Guard was bringing back to life, which flowed elegantly through the woods, bending softly on the hillsides.

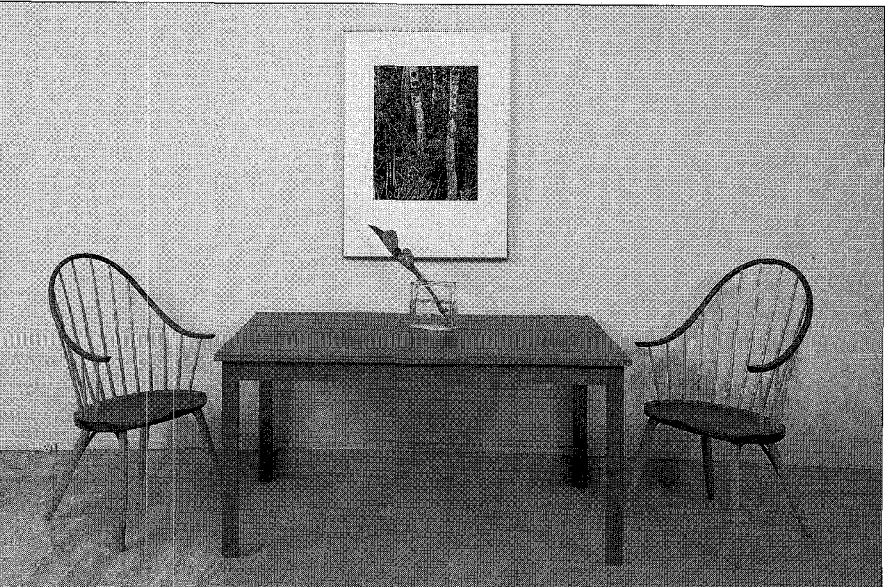
Not everyone loves rail trails. Nonetheless, the fears of vandalism and trespassing expressed in advance of a trail's opening have seldom been realized once the trail is in use. In fact the opposite has been true—people who won't speak on the street greet one another on rail trails. They are in fact so successful that even as the coast-to-coast network of rail trails (supplemented by old canal towpaths) emerges, they've given impetus to a parallel movement of hybrid long-distance trails that stitch together rail trails, country roads, and other overlooked corridors. There are now plans for an East Coast Greenway from Boston to Washington, D.C., which will incorporate the Connecticut and Rhode Island rail trails, several canal corridors, and even a bike path next to the historic Merritt Parkway in Connecticut. The American Discovery Trail—part rail trails, part back roads, part traditional footpath—will soon stretch from California to Delaware. And every new mile of railroad-provided trail will recapture the experiences planned by those other engineers, the ones who went to work in our behalf so long ago. ☼



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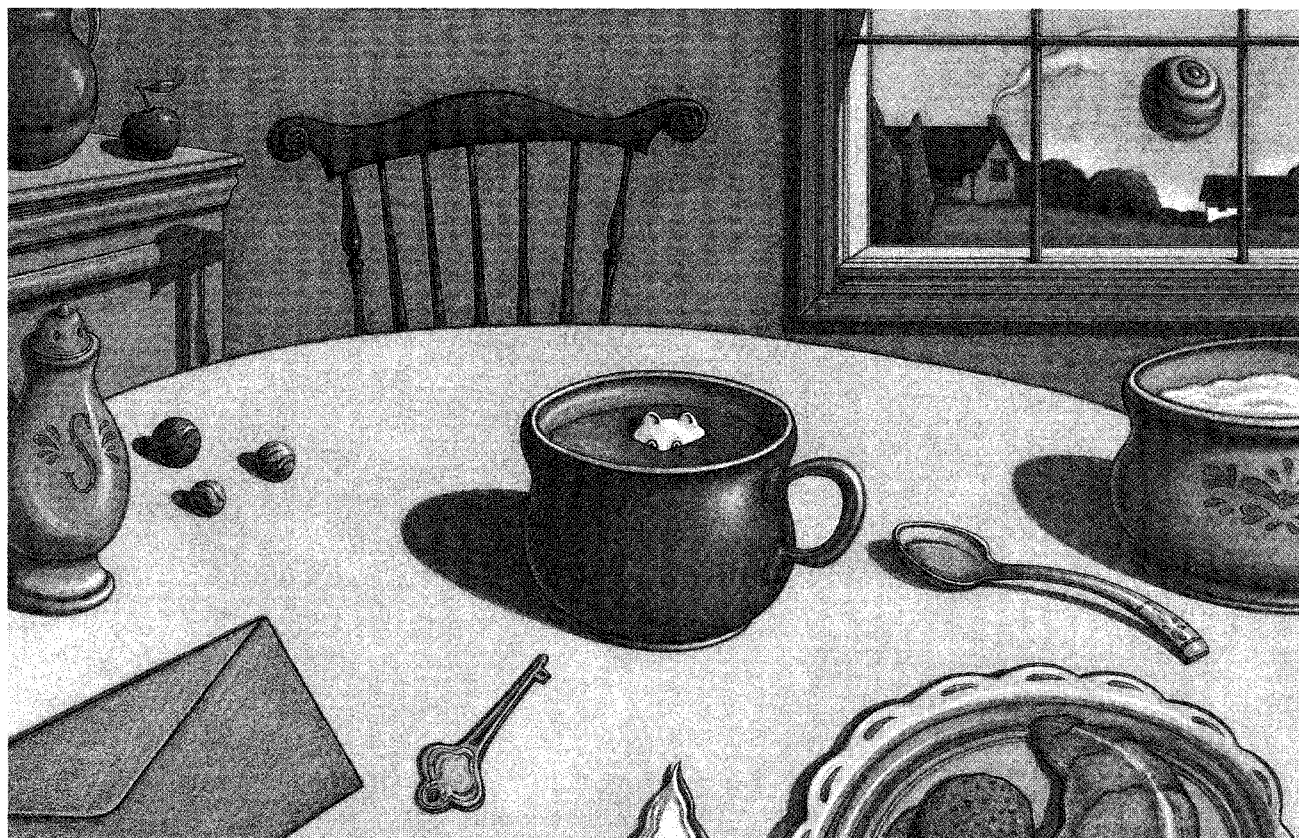


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Doggone

*Reflections on an unlikely
family heirloom*

YOU never knew which one of you would get it next—or which one it would come from. You just knew that out of the blue the little creature would show up—in your top drawer with your socks, or tucked in the toe of your sneaker, or nestled in your lunch pail under your sandwich. Your probing fingers would discover the by-now familiar but always unexpected white ceramic toy dog—a small handful sitting on its fat haunches, with a ridiculous grin on its doggy face.

One time it was even found smuggled into someone's mashed potatoes. How everyone would laugh at the recipient's surprise. The butt of the joke would laugh

hardest, feeling loved. Later, when you had gone off to camp, or even later, to college, there it would be, falling into your hand as you unpacked your lonely suitcase. Gotcha! it seemed to say, bringing family and home close.

It came into our lives first, I suppose, as a present to one of us, who thought it so silly it had to be pawned off at once on an unsuspecting sibling or parent. Perhaps every family has such an object—one that becomes a talisman, taking on a significance related not in the least to what it is but rather to its entanglement in webs of relationship.

At Christmastime and on birthdays in the first few years we were all very care-

ful about largish, beautifully wrapped packages of unknown origin—large to conceal the size of the contents. In turn we tried to be as sneaky as we could in passing it along. What fun it was to anticipate the pleasure given and received. And what fun it was just to be in touch.

It got to be years between sightings. It got to be many years since the last. And in those years the fabric of the family loosened, lost its holding power. There were marriages and breakups, partings and misunderstandings, hostilities and bitternesses. There were deaths and resentments and heartaches and not-speakings. I think every family has these, too.

And then one day . . . You know what should come next in a satisfying story. But alas, no. Vivid as the smile of that dippy dog is in my mind's eye, tangible as its smooth-skinned, lumpy body is to my mind's touch, I cannot quite visualize it in a place. I have searched and searched the recesses of my knowledge, turning memories over like piles of discarded garments. Who could have had it last? And then one day came the staggering thought: could it have been *I* who let it fall, who let us all fall, from grace? ☾

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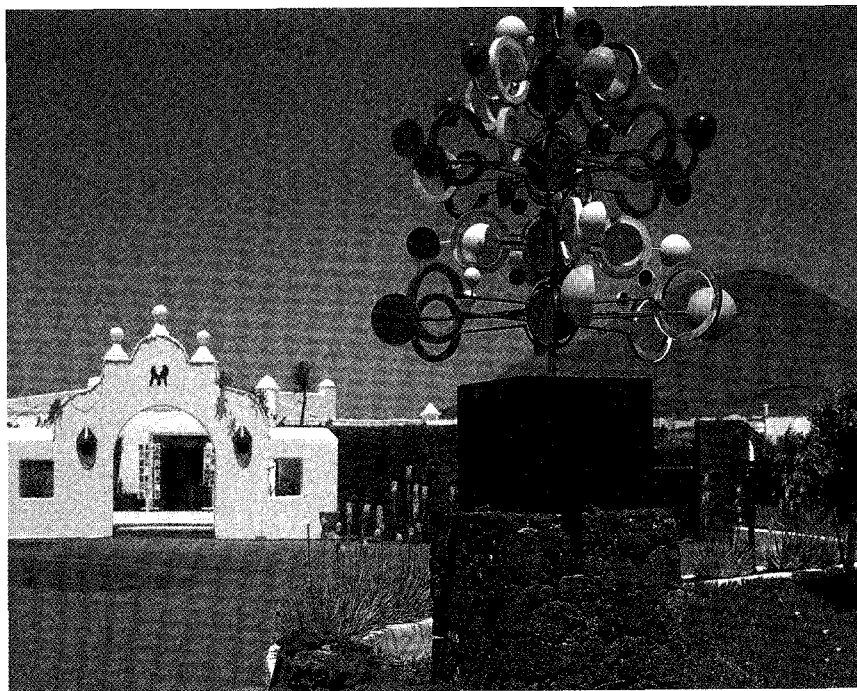
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STEVE VIDLER/TONY STONE IMAGES

Pleasure Islands

*The Canaries offer different
visions of the sublime*

IN other times travelers would get down on their knees and pray. In ours they stop and take out cameras. They must do something in the face of Timanfaya National Park, a vast scar on Lanzarote, one of the Canary Islands, seventy miles from the western shoulder of Africa. If human beings had made this desert of cinders, Timanfaya would show rage enough to curse the world. Even as geology, not history, this black chaos inspires dread. From horizon to horizon nothing grows, no insect moves, no bird sings. The wasteland glowers, but I found it exhilarating. What a tantrum! Although the seven Canaries remain volcanically active (the most recent eruption was in 1971, in La Palma), the volcanoes on Lanzarote don't faze anyone, for they have done little more than sulk for the past 260 years. The earth in Timanfaya is still too warm for plants, but at one of

the few human structures in the park, a restaurant designed by the artist and visionary César Manrique, locals treat the volcano as so fully domesticated that they use its fire, in an open pit, to broil meat.

Last spring I visited Lanzarote to see this restaurant and other works by Manrique. The park itself was created at his suggestion.

Manrique's intention was to harmonize history, culture, and economic needs with the natural environment, and his vision of development stands apart from the usual zero-sum conflict between birds and jobs. Lanzarote was Manrique's birthplace, and people now call the whole island his greatest work of art. Declared a World Biosphere Reserve by UNESCO in 1993, Lanzarote has won recognition as a model and an inspiration. Manrique's architecture, mobiles, and influence are visible everywhere on the island; he used volcanoes,

pools, cliffs, buildings, institutions, and public opinion to achieve his goal.

The Canaries are to Europe as the Caribbean is to the United States—a warm haven, sought by millions of visitors a year. Even before the 1400s, when the Spanish landed, fought the native Guanche people, and conquered the islands, classical and medieval texts referred to them as Enchanted Isles and Isles of the Blessed. Although the Canaries remain a Spanish possession, and Spanish is the principal language, most visitors are from northern Europe, and those locals involved in the tourist trade tend to be able to talk with them in both German and English. The high season is the Northern Hemisphere's winter, but the islands are attractive all year round. The Canaries never get hot; the temperature ranges from about 62° to 78° Fahrenheit. Snow sometimes adorns the upper slopes of Teide, the volcanic mountain that dominates Tenerife and the highest peak in Spanish territory. There are no hurricanes. The cliché is eternal spring, although winds blow cool and wet from the northwest in spring, hot and dry from the Sahara in fall.

The islands, from treeless Lanzarote to lush La Palma to undeveloped Hierro—a span of about 275 miles east to west—vary greatly in rainfall, vegetation, and social climate. Just five percent of the Canaries' population of 1,471,500 lives on Lanzarote, and so it was comparatively easy for Manrique to shape this small island. Almost half the population lives on Tenerife, the largest island, which I also visited. Tenerife's sunny south is known for beaches that attract raucous and drunken young tourists; the northwest coast draws more Atlantic rain and a more sedate crowd. I flew there to see the town of Puerto de la Cruz. Puerto, which has no beach, commissioned Manrique in 1970 to design Lago Martiánez—eight acres of pools, fountains, gardens, and terraces that in effect substitute for surf and sand. In Tenerife, Manrique's work harmonizes with Spanish colonial architecture and twentieth-century buildings; in Lanzarote it dominates and sets the tone.

*A mobile by César Manrique at
the entrance to his house*



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CÉSAR Manrique was born on Lanzarote in 1919 or 1920 (biographical texts disagree) and died there in 1992. As a young man, he studied art and painted in Madrid, becoming a friend of Joan Miró and members of the Spanish royal family, and representing Spain at the 1955 and the 1960 Venice Biennale. In 1964 Nelson Rockefeller invited him to New York and bought a painting from him. Soon Manrique was showing at New York galleries, and when BMW commissioned artists to paint a series of cars, it invited him to paint one, along with Richard Rauschenberg, Roy Lichtenstein, and David Hockney. Still, his paintings look dull to me. He is far less well known for his two-dimensional canvases than for his multi-dimensional work on Lanzarote; in 1968 he returned to the island to live and set about saving it from both poverty and ugly development. He devoted the last two and a half decades of his life to this work.

The house he built for himself soon after his arrival is now a museum. Within its white walls Manrique's imagination guided me like a good host. Sinuous passages plastered by hand lead to three bubbles of lava he used as living rooms, surprising and comforting spaces, and then to a fourth bubble, open like a cup, that holds a garden and a swimming pool. The house seems a sensual organism that fuses the earth with human purpose. It drew me from globes to vista, up and down, from light to shade, and into attending to movement, texture, and color. White walls alternate with walls of black lava. Doors and window frames are painted brown and green. Green plants grow in black lava. In this restrained spectrum a red geranium blazes like a fanfare.

The house shows eloquently what Manrique must have longed for in Madrid and New York. It speaks of homesickness for earth close enough to touch, for space, quiet, sun, breeze, fire, and the

sound of water—delights I also long for in dark winters and closed buildings. In Manrique's architecture Lanzarote's traditions, such as low white silhouettes and green doors, harmonize with International Style glass and simplicity. Even Manrique's bold use of volcanic bubbles suggests that he took inspiration from local people: Canary farmers use natural caves as storerooms.

The house embodies Manrique's principle of preserving scenery while meeting the needs of people. Thousands used to emigrate each year, out of economic necessity. Canary wine failed against sherry and Madeira.

and set out to persuade Lanzarote's residents to hew to their white, green, and black, and to shun noise, neon, and garish advertising. Now, faithful to his vision, the island has prospered—its permanent population has doubled since 1968, to 75,000—even as it preserves its dignity. A few years ago Renault put up billboards. Negative publicity brought them down.

It probably helped Manrique's cause that he worked with,

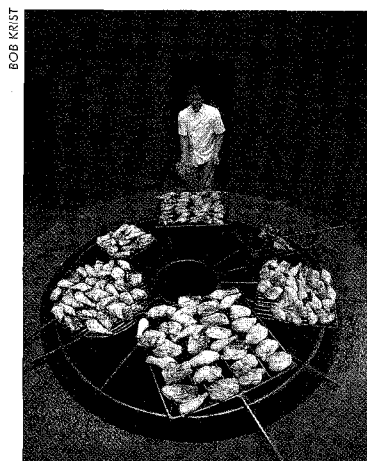
not against, the tourism industry and the government, designing or helping to design hotels, restaurants, tourist attractions, roads, and even the airport. The village of Puerto del Carmen, along miles of sandy beach, has a strip dense with boutiques, camera shops, and eateries. Manrique's influence here shows as some restraint in style—there are no big bright signs—and density. Compliance with Manrique's vision is now a matter of zoning regulations as well as of true belief, but Lanzarote could not be as architecturally integrated as it is without broad popular support.

RESTRAINT, of course, can be boring, so Manrique designed some awesome and fascinating spectacles—among them El Diablo, the restaurant

in Timanfaya that sits on a live volcano. As I drove toward it, I passed a string of dromedaries about to carry tourists into the lava dunes. The dromedaries knelt in a line, the tourists mounted, the beasts stood, and nervousness gave way to giggles.

Soon I came to an iron sculpture of a devil—he did not seem really bad—

and parked. To visit El Diablo and see more of the surrounding Montañas del Fuego—seventy-seven square miles of spectacular lava, calderas, volcanic



BOB KRIST



STEVE VIDLER/TONY STONE IMAGES

Top, chicken on a geothermal grill at El Diablo; above, grapevines amid crushed lava at La Geria; right, Jameos del Agua

Cactus farming for cochineal beetles failed against synthetic dyes that replaced the insects' red. In 1968 tourism seemed the only hope, but—as Tenerife even then demonstrated—tourism could pollute Lanzarote's air, blast its quiet, clutter its vistas, and tart up its beaches.

Manrique sought to attract tourists who would appreciate what he loved,



JAN JEPSEN/FOCUS

rocks, and dunes—tourists must board either a camel or a bus. But first I followed a group to where a ranger was pushing brush down into a pit. In seconds smoke heaved and a dragon clawed out with orange flames. Another ranger poured water down a pipe and then counted to three; a geyser exploded, and cameras clicked. The dragon does stupid pet tricks.

The glass restaurant seemed too small and perky for its surroundings—360 degrees of burned wasteland. It encloses an atrium containing a dead tree and a grim line of bones. No green. To relieve this funereal landscape Manrique offered a joke, lights set in big frying pans, called *caldera*, but the humor seemed silly to me. Caged by the clichés of taped commentary and movie music on the hour-long bus tour, I was beginning to feel dragonish myself. Manrique's house had deepened my senses. Here the glass flattened them, making the world a photograph.

Unwilling to eat in the glass cage, I drove to Yaiza, one of the inland villages that Manrique's foresight preserved from degrading exploitation. In a homestead that survived the eruptions of 1730–1736, which covered a quarter of the island with lava, a restaurant served me good Canarian food—small *pimientos* stuffed with cod, a meat-and-vegetable stew called *puchero*, and a fried banana that had probably been grown on Tenerife. After lunch, strolling through the courtyard garden and past a sweep of *bougainvillea* to a plaza stilled for *siestas*, I heard my own footsteps.

In sympathy with Manrique again, I was ready for another place he loved. To reach it I drove through the weird landscape of La Geria, where grapevines, each in its own crater of crushed lava, pattern the hills. The craters look like a moonscape, but this is earth—black, fertile, and farmed for wine. At the Jardin de Cactus, my destination, Manrique paid homage to the tradition of planting in craters. Here one large bowl cradles bizarre rocks and a thousand varieties of prickly leaves and snake and barrel shapes. Ferocious spines protect blooms as tender as silk, and when a woman said that one of the fuzzy creatures, with pink buds, was so cute that she was tempted to hug it, I laughed. The painful bristle did look cuddly.



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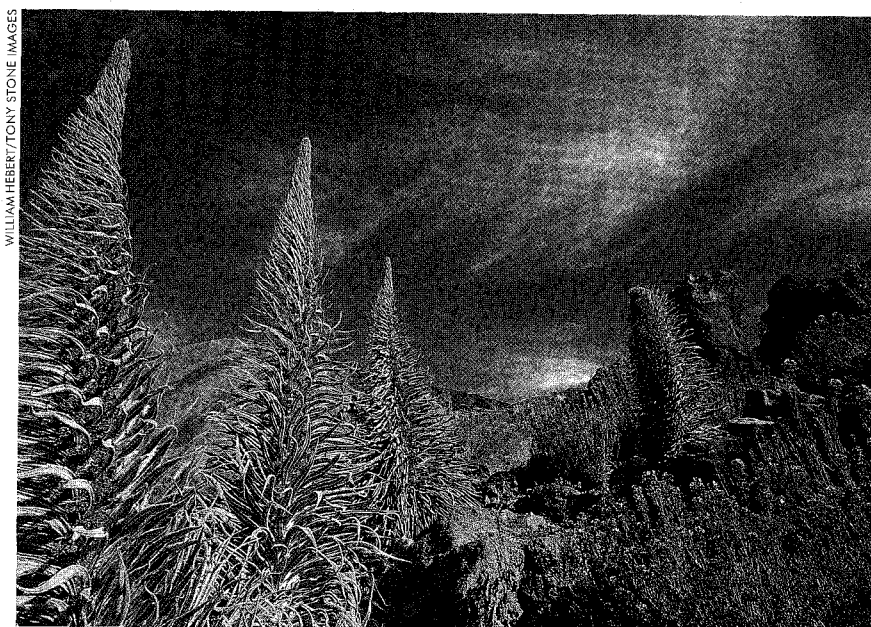
THE high point of my visit came the next day, at Jameos del Agua. This was a dumpsite before Manrique found it, in 1968, and made it into a tourist attraction. Where a natural volcanic tube holds two seawater pools, he created a place for people to descend into a dark tunnel, pass a dark pool, and then climb into gardens and up stairways that lead back to the surface and the light.

Entering through a doorway in white walls, I stepped down a zigzag stairway to the tunnel and the pool, which harbors a unique species of blind crab. In a space that opens out from the tunnel, seats and a café invite visitors to stop and reflect. From that vantage point the arch of the tunnel and its reflection in the water formed a circle in which I saw luminous people moving and plants on the other

tered plants softened the rocks. The stairs climbed to a level where I could see, outside the tube, gardens and a wide valley sloping down to a blue bay and a white village. Up more stairs the tube reached the surface and the view repeated what I had seen before, now with a wider vista and ocean on two sides. Echoes and reflections. Smoke and mirrors, I thought: Timanfaya and Jameos del Agua. And everything in dynamic balance.

I wonder whether the balance can survive success. Tourists throw coins into the dark pool, where signs explain that metal endangers the blind crabs. And though Lanzarote still has hideaways, preserved by poor or nonexistent roads and high

*Distinctive flora on Tenerife,
atop the volcano Teide*



side answering the breeze. A bird flew toward the tunnel from a rock near my shoulder, and I thought of a kaleidoscope, making pattern from chaos. To reach the reflected garden on the other side I joined the file of tourists and followed a tight path past the water. There was a balustrade—with, as in the handrails on the stairs, deliberate gaps. A touch of danger in this underworld. I glimpsed light through a small hole in the tunnel roof. When I looked back from the other side of the dark pool, the place I had come from glowed like a rose window.

Tables, a dance floor, and a stage equip Jameos for evening shows and parties, and the reflections add glamour. At the second pool sunlit blue water and shel-

property values, the thousands who visited in the 1970s are now millions. Indeed, in 1996 arriving tourists outnumbered the residents by twenty to one. We fill the hotels, condominiums, and restaurants; we want roads, and make the traffic circles that center on Manrique's mobiles more dangerous. It was at one of these that Manrique was killed, in a crash.

LANZAROTE is faithful to the vision of one artist, but Puerto de la Cruz, on Tenerife, flirts with many—Manrique included, of course, but especially Impressionists in love with color. Not restraint but excess is the watchword here. Flowers, scents, and birds multiply like dreams; blossoms fill the eye, from pan-

sies below to jacaranda above, and yellow snapdragons, red cannas, pink oleander, white datura, blue plumbago. In the plaza I breathed sweet stocks, in the steep streets roses. In the botanical gardens canaries sang overhead. The wonder is that Puerto's sweetness is not cloying.

Manrique's brilliant series of pools, restaurants, and gardens attract visitors to spaces that feel almost secluded from the busy town behind. Tenerife's tourist trade, which started in the late nineteenth century, surged when passenger planes began making direct flights from Europe to the island, in 1959. By 1968 Tenerife was already heavily developed and set on its course.

Today sleek five-star hotels throng near the Atlantic, but most of Puerto feels nineteenth-century. A short walk leads from the esplanades, where breakers thrash, to tiers of apartments, each with a verandah and geraniums. Behind them vines robe cliffs in morning glories. Within easy walking distance of the tiny harbor, cafés, restaurants, and shops border plazas, and musicians fill the streets with songs my mother used to hum. My hotel in the old center, the Monopol, which opened in 1888, offered violin concerts and kept its two threshold steps decorated with fresh flowers. One day I stepped over a lace of fern and gladiolus, the next over hibiscus and bougainvillea. Delicious monsters in the atrium grew five floors high, and I overheard a guest on an interior verandah exclaim at a basket of orchids: "They're real!"

On Tenerife I visited Spanish churches; took the bus to colonial towns; ate delicious fresh-caught fish and "wrinkled potatoes," boiled in salt water and served with two sauces, one red and hot, the other green and cool; and considered a day trip to Gomera, the next island west, where Columbus stopped in 1492. Next time. This time I was made uneasy by the sentimental waltzes and lieder pitched to German guests nostalgic for the good old days. Were they longing for the 1930s? The 1940s? After one meal I rejected the hotel's basement dining room, with its steam tables, northern food, and hawk-eyed maitre d', who seated me facing a pillar because I was a woman traveling alone. I found instead a restaurant where a guest celebrating her birthday sent me champagne. But I had found flaws in paradise and was ready to leave. ☘

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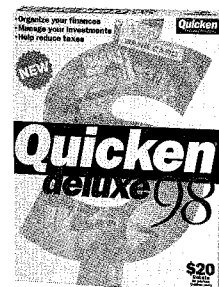
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Was Democracy Just a Moment?

by ROBERT D. KAPLAN

IN the fourth century A.D. Christianity's conquest of Europe and the Mediterranean world gave rise to the belief that a peaceful era in world politics was at hand, now that a consensus had formed around an ideology that stressed the sanctity of the individual. But Christianity was, of course, not static. It kept evolving, into rites, sects, and "heresies" that were in turn influenced by the geography and cultures of the places where it took root. Meanwhile, the church founded by Saint Peter became a ritualistic and hierarchical organization guilty of long periods of violence and bigotry. This is to say nothing of the evils perpetrated by the Orthodox churches in the East. Christianity made the world not more peaceful or, in practice, more moral but only more complex. Democracy, which is now overtaking the world as Christianity once did, may do the same.

The collapse of communism from internal stresses says



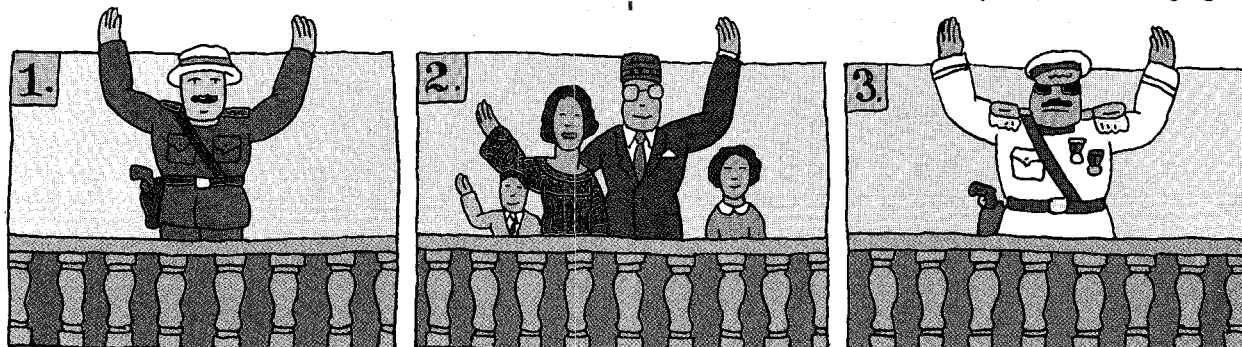
The global triumph
of democracy was to be the
glorious climax of the
American Century.

But democracy may not be
the system that will best serve
the world—or even the one
that will prevail in places
that now consider themselves
bastions of freedom

Tocqueville went on, "is more particularly to be feared in democratic ages," because it thrives on the obsession with self and one's own security which equality fosters.

I submit that the democracy we are encouraging in

nothing about the long-term viability of Western democracy. Marxism's natural death in Eastern Europe is no guarantee that subtler tyrannies do not await us, here and abroad. History has demonstrated that there is no final triumph of reason, whether it goes by the name of Christianity, the Enlightenment, or, now, democracy. To think that democracy as we know it will triumph—or is even here to stay—is itself a form of determinism, driven by our own ethnocentricity. Indeed, those who quote Alexis de Tocqueville in support of democracy's inevitability should pay heed to his observation that Americans, because of their (comparative) equality, exaggerate "the scope of human perfectibility." Despotism,





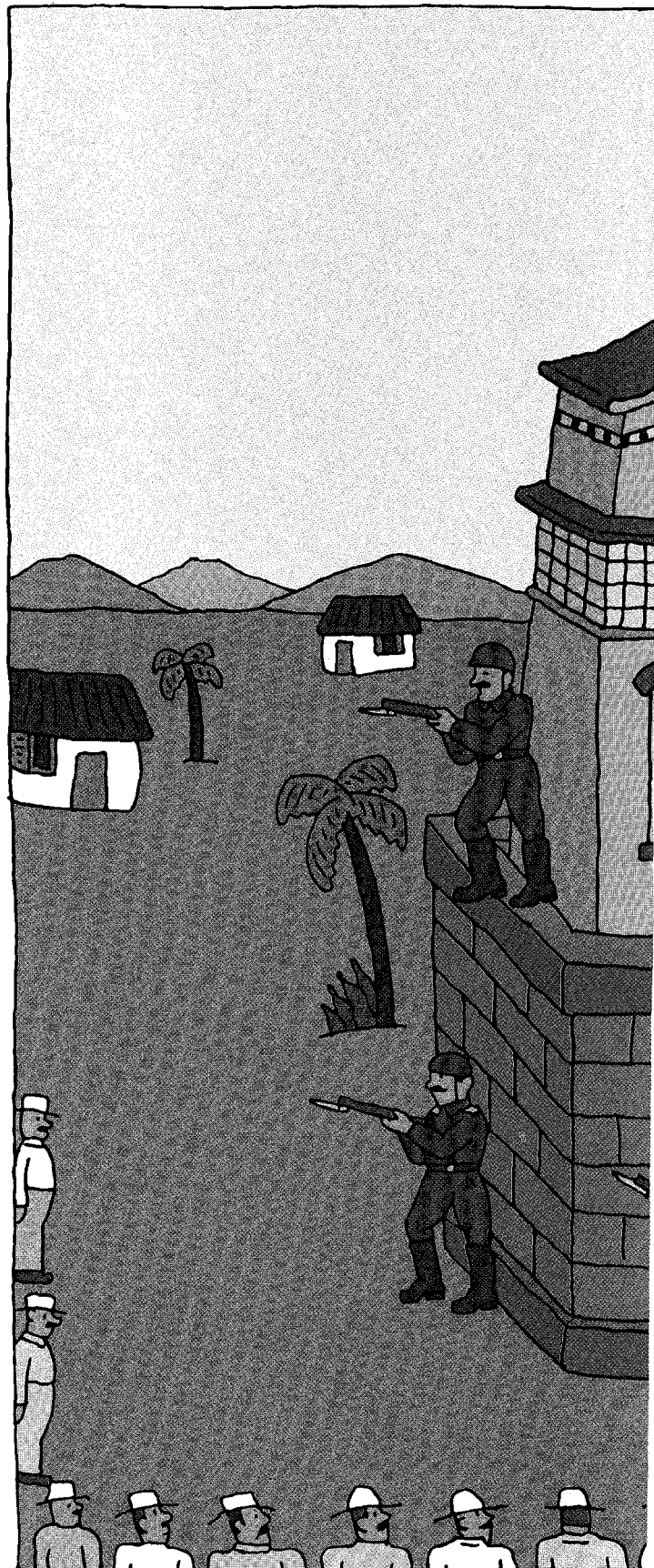
many poor parts of the world is an integral part of a transformation toward new forms of authoritarianism; that democracy in the United States is at greater risk than ever before, and from obscure sources; and that many future regimes, ours especially, could resemble the oligarchies of ancient Athens and Sparta more than they do the current government in Washington. History teaches that it is exactly at such prosperous times as these that we need to maintain a sense of the tragic, however unnecessary it may seem. The Greek historian Polybius, of the second century B.C., interpreted what we consider the Golden Age of Athens as the beginning of its decline. To Thucydides, the very security and satisfactory life that the Athenians enjoyed under Pericles blinded them to the bleak forces of human nature that were gradually to be their undoing in the Peloponnesian War.

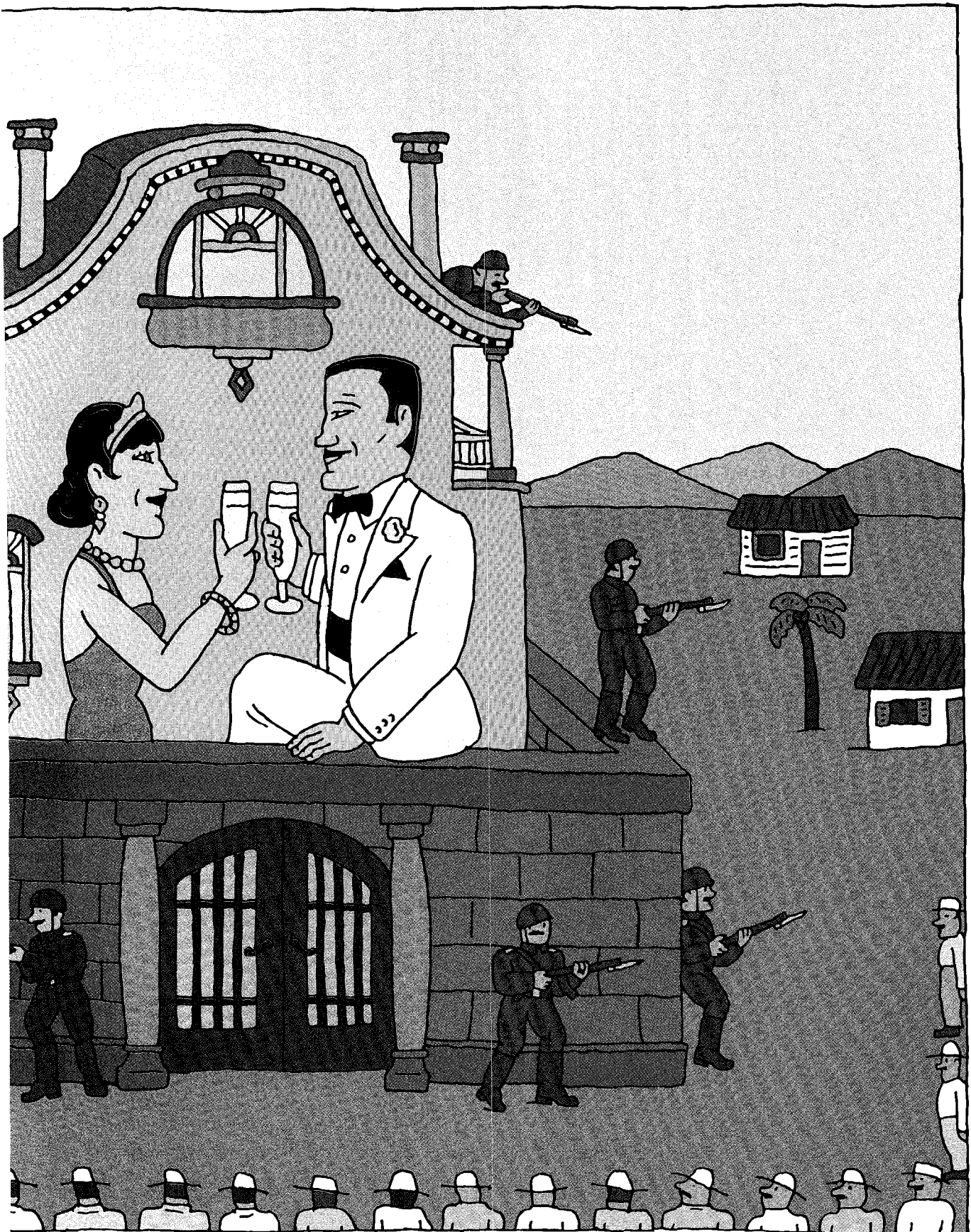
My pessimism is, I hope, a foundation for prudence. America's Founders were often dismal about the human condition. James Madison: "Had every Athenian citizen been a Socrates, every Athenian assembly would still have been a mob." Thomas Paine: "Society is produced by our wants and government by our wickedness." It was the "crude" and "reactionary" philosophy of Thomas Hobbes, which placed security ahead of liberty in a system of enlightened despotism, from which the Founders drew philosophical sustenance. Paul A. Rahe, a professor of history at the University of Tulsa, shows in his superb three-volume *Republics Ancient and Modern* (1992) how the Founders partly rejected the ancient republics, which were based on virtue, for a utilitarian regime that channeled man's selfish, materialistic instincts toward benign ends. Man, Benjamin Franklin said in an apparent defense of Hobbesian determinism, is "a tool-making animal."

H Democracies Are Value-Neutral

ITLER and Mussolini each came to power through democracy. Democracies do not always make societies more civil—but they do always mercilessly expose the health of the societies in which they operate.

In April of 1985 I found myself in the middle of a Sudanese crowd that had just helped to overthrow a military regime and replace it with a new government, which the following year held free and fair elections. Sudan's newly elected democracy led immediately to anarchy, which in turn led to the most brutal tyranny in Sudan's postcolonial







history: a military regime that broadened the scope of executions, persecuted women, starved non-Muslims to death, sold kidnapped non-Muslim children back to their parents for \$200, and made Khartoum the terrorism capital of the Arab world, replacing Beirut. In Sudan only 27 percent of the population (and only 12 percent of the women) could read. If a society is not in reasonable health, democracy can be not only risky but disastrous: during the last phases of the post-First World War German and Italian democracies, for example, the unemployment and inflation figures for Germany and the amount of civil unrest in Italy were just as abysmal as Sudan's literacy rates.

As an unemployed Tunisian student once told me, "In Tunisia we have a twenty-five percent unemployment rate. If you hold elections in such circumstances, the result will be a fundamentalist government and violence like in Algeria. First create an economy, then worry about elections." There are many differences between Tunisia and its neighbor Algeria, including the fact that Tunisia has been peaceful without democracy and Algeria erupted in violence in 1992 after its first election went awry and the military canceled the second. In Kurdistan and Afghanistan, two fragile tribal societies in which the United States encouraged versions of democracy in the 1990s, the security vacuums that followed the failed attempts at institutionalizing pluralism were filled by Saddam Hussein for a time in Kurdistan and by Islamic tyranny in much of Afghanistan. In Bosnia democracy legitimized the worst war crimes in Europe since the Nazi era. In sub-Saharan Africa democracy has weakened institutions and services in some states, and elections have been manipulated to restore dictatorship in others. In Sierra Leone and Congo-Brazzaville elections have led to chaos. In Mali, which Africa-watchers have christened a democratic success story, recent elections were boycotted by the opposition and were marred by killings and riots. Voter turnout was less than 20 percent. Even in Latin America, the Third World's most successful venue for democracy, the record is murky. Venezuela has enjoyed elected civilian governments since 1959, whereas for most of the 1970s and 1980s Chile was effectively under military rule. But Venezuela is a society in turmoil, with periodic coup attempts, rampant crime, and an elite that invests most of its savings outside the country; as a credit risk Venezuela ranks behind only Russia and Mexico. Chile has become a stable middle-class society whose economic growth rate compares to those of the Pacific Rim. Democratic Colombia is a pageant of bloodletting, and many members of the middle class are attempting to leave the country. Then there is

Peru, where, all the faults of the present regime notwithstanding, a measure of stability has been achieved by a retreat from democracy into quasi-authoritarianism.

Throughout Latin America there is anxiety that unless the middle classes are enlarged and institutions modernized, the wave of democratization will not be consolidated. Even in an authentically democratic nation like Argentina, institutions are weak and both corruption and unemployment are high. President Carlos Menem's second term has raised questions about democracy's sustainability—questions that the success of his first term seemed to have laid to rest. In Brazil and other countries democracy faces a backlash from millions of badly educated and newly urbanized dwellers in teeming slums, who see few palpable benefits to Western parliamentary systems. Their discontent is a reason for the multifold increases in crime in many Latin American cities over the past decade.

Because both a middle class and civil institutions are required for successful democracy, democratic Russia, which inherited neither from the Soviet regime, remains violent, unstable, and miserably poor despite its 99 percent literacy rate. Under its authoritarian system China has dramatically improved the quality of life for hundreds of millions of its people. My point, hard as it may be for Americans to accept, is that Russia may be failing in part because it is a democracy and China may be succeeding in part because it is not. Having traveled through much of western China, where Muslim Turkic Uighurs (who despise the Chinese) often predominate, I find it hard to imagine a truly democratic China without at least a partial breakup of the country. Such a breakup would lead to chaos in western China, because the Uighurs are poorer and less educated than most Chinese and have a terrible historical record of governing themselves. Had the student demonstrations in 1989 in Tiananmen Square led to democracy, would the astoundingly high economic growth rates of the 1990s still obtain? I am not certain, because democracy in China would have ignited turmoil not just in the Muslim west of the country but elsewhere, too; order would have decreased but corruption would not have. The social and economic breakdowns under democratic rule in Albania and Bulgaria, where the tradition of pre-communist bourgeois life is weak or nonexistent (as in China), contrasted with more-successful democratic venues like Hungary and the Czech Republic, which have had well-established bourgeoisie, constitute further proof that our belief in democracy regardless of local conditions amounts to cultural hubris.

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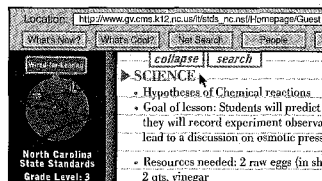
Parents in Charlotte, North Carolina now have an uncanny ability to understand exactly what their kids are learning. They're using a specially designed Web site that lets them get involved with class projects, track their children's progress, even find out what's on the lunch menu.

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The project, called "Wired For Learning," was developed by a dedicated team of IBM

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air from Miami, where 22,000 American soldiers were dispatched in 1994 to restore "democracy." Five percent of eligible Haitian voters participated in an election last April, chronic instability continues, and famine threatens. Those who think that America can establish democracy the world over should heed the words of the late American theologian and political philosopher Reinhold Niebuhr:

The same strength which has extended our power beyond a continent has also . . . brought us into a vast web of history in which other wills, running in oblique or contrasting directions to our own, inevitably hinder or contradict what we most fervently desire. We cannot simply have our way, not even when we believe our way to have the "happiness of mankind" as its promise.

The lesson to draw is not that dictatorship is good and democracy bad but that democracy emerges successfully only as a capstone to other social and economic achievements. In his "Author's Introduction" to *Democracy in America*, Tocqueville showed how democracy evolved in the West not through the kind of moral fiat we are trying to impose throughout the world but as an organic outgrowth of development. European society had reached a level of complexity and sophistication at which the aristocracy, so as not to overburden itself, had to confer a measure of equality upon other citizens and allocate some responsibility to them: a structured division of the population into peacefully competing interest groups was necessary if both tyranny and anarchy were to be averted.

The very fact that we retreat to moral arguments—and often moral arguments only—to justify democracy indicates that for many parts of the world the historical and social arguments supporting democracy are just not there. Realism has come not from us but from, for example, Uganda's President Yoweri Museveni, an enlightened Hobbesian despot whose country has posted impressive annual economic growth rates—10 percent recently—despite tribal struggles in the country's north. In 1986 Museveni's army captured the Ugandan capital of Kampala without looting a single shop; Museveni postponed elections and saw that they took place in a manner that ensured his victory. "I happen to be one of those people who do not believe in multi-party democracy," Museveni has written. "In fact, I am totally opposed to it as far as Africa today is concerned. . . . If one forms a multi-party system in Uganda, a party cannot win elections unless it finds a way of dividing the ninety-four percent of the electorate [that consists of peasants], and this is where the main problem

comes up: tribalism, religion, or regionalism becomes the basis for intense partisanship." In other words, in a society that has not reached the level of development Tocqueville described, a multi-party system merely hardens and institutionalizes established ethnic and regional divisions. Look at Armenia and Azerbaijan, where democratic processes brought nationalists to power upon the demise of the Soviet Union: each leader furthered his country's slide into war. A coup in Azerbaijan was necessary to restore peace and, by developing Azerbaijan's enormous oil resources, foster economic growth. Without the coup Western oil companies would not have gained their current foothold, which has allowed the United States to increase pressure on neighboring Iran at the same time that we attempt to normalize relations with Iran "on our terms."

Certainly, moral arguments in support of democracy were aired at the 1787 Constitutional Convention in Philadelphia, but they were tempered by the kind of historical and social analysis we now abjure. "The Constitution of the United States was written by fifty-five men—and one ghost," writes retired Army Lieutenant General Dave R. Palmer in *1794: America, Its Army, and the Birth of the Nation* (1994). The ghost was that of Oliver Cromwell, the archetypal man on horseback who, in the course of defending Parliament against the monarchy in the mid seventeenth century, devised a tyranny worse than any that had ever existed under the English Kings. The Founders were terrified of a badly educated populace that could be duped by a Cromwell, and of a system that could allow too much power to fall into one person's hands. That is why they constructed a system that filtered the whims of the masses through an elected body and dispersed power by dividing the government into three branches.

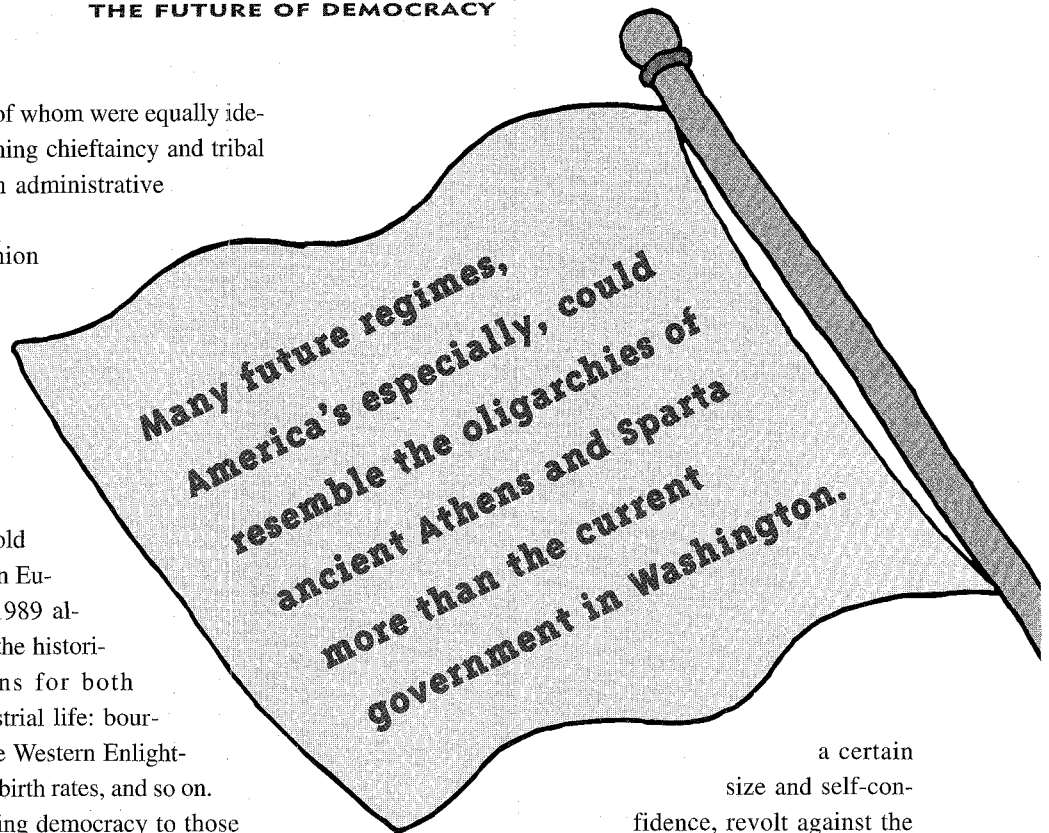
The ghosts of today we ignore—like the lesson offered by Rwanda, where the parliamentary system the West promoted was a factor in the murder of hundreds of thousands of Tutsis by Hutu militias. In 1992, responding partly to pressure from Western governments, the Rwandan regime established a multi-party system and transformed itself into a coalition government. The new political parties became masks for ethnic groups that organized murderous militias, and the coalition nature of the new government helped to prepare the context for the events that led to the genocide in 1994. Evil individuals were certainly responsible for the mass murder. But they operated within a fatally flawed system, which our own ethnocentric hubris helped to construct. Indeed, our often moralistic attempts to impose Western parliamentary systems on other countries are not dissimilar to the attempts of nineteenth-centu-

ry Western colonialists—many of whom were equally idealistic—to replace well-functioning chieftaincy and tribal patronage systems with foreign administrative practices.

The demise of the Soviet Union was no reason for us to pressure Rwanda and other countries to form political parties—though that is what our post-Cold War foreign policy has been largely about, even in parts of the world that the Cold War barely touched. The Eastern European countries liberated in 1989 already had, in varying degrees, the historical and social preconditions for both democracy and advanced industrial life: bourgeois traditions, exposure to the Western Enlightenment, high literacy rates, low birth rates, and so on. The post-Cold War effort to bring democracy to those countries has been reasonable. What is less reasonable is to put a gun to the head of the peoples of the developing world and say, in effect, “Behave as if you had experienced the Western Enlightenment to the degree that Poland and the Czech Republic did. Behave as if 95 percent of your population were literate. Behave as if you had no bloody ethnic or regional disputes.”

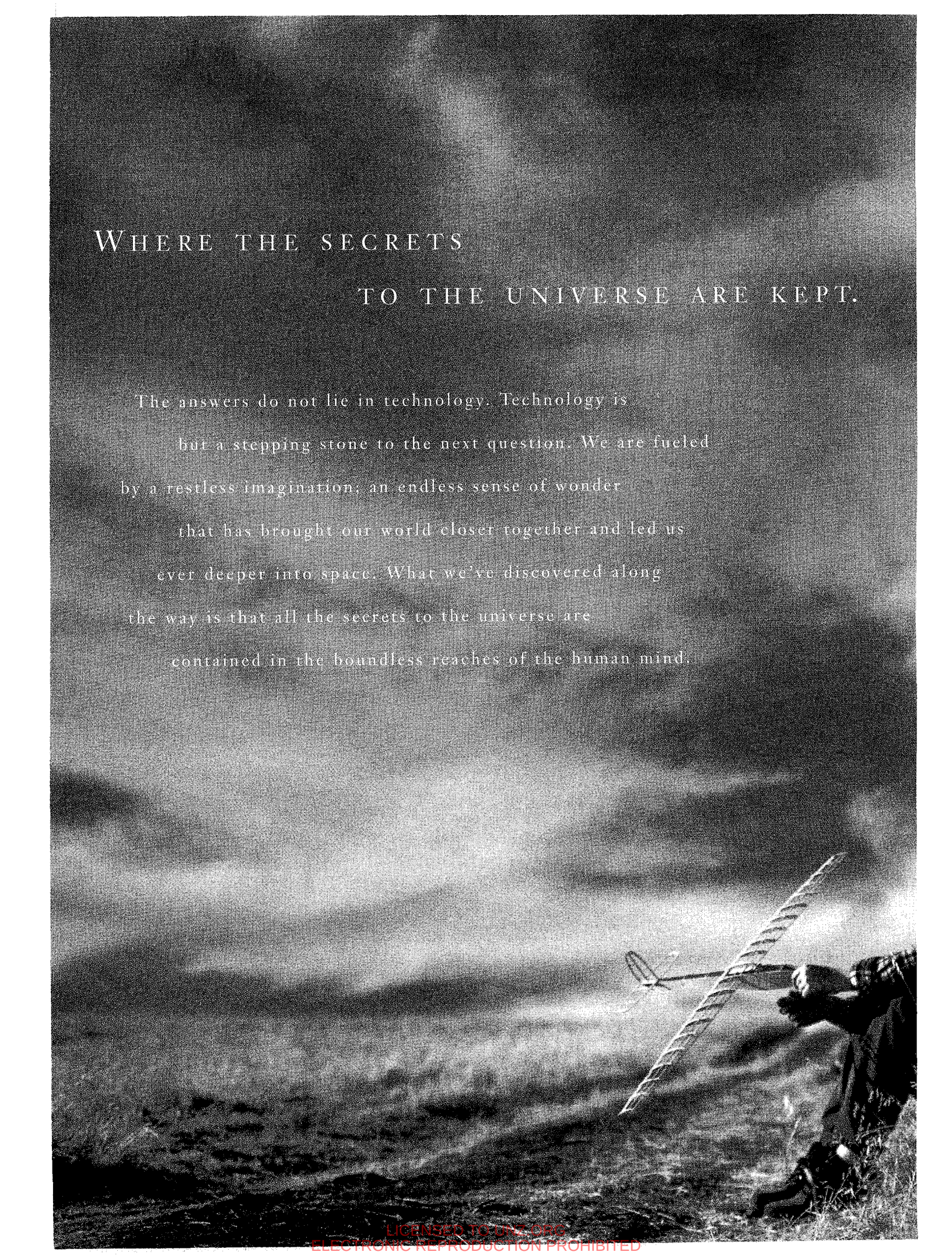
States have never been formed by elections. Geography, settlement patterns, the rise of literate bourgeoisie, and, tragically, ethnic cleansing have formed states. Greece, for instance, is a stable democracy partly because earlier in the century it carried out a relatively benign form of ethnic cleansing—in the form of refugee transfers—which created a monoethnic society. Nonetheless, it took several decades of economic development for Greece finally to put its coups behind it. Democracy often weakens states by necessitating ineffectual compromises and fragile coalition governments in societies where bureaucratic institutions never functioned well to begin with. Because democracy neither forms states nor strengthens them initially, multi-party systems are best suited to nations that already have efficient bureaucracies and a middle class that pays income tax, and where primary issues such as borders and power-sharing have already been resolved, leaving politicians free to bicker about the budget and other secondary matters.

Social stability results from the establishment of a middle class. Not democracies but authoritarian systems, including monarchies, create middle classes—which, having achieved



a certain size and self-confidence, revolt against the very dictators who generated their prosperity. This is the pattern today in the Pacific Rim and the southern cone of South America, but not in other parts of Latin America, southern Asia, or sub-Saharan Africa. A place like the Democratic Republic of Congo (formerly Zaire), where the per capita gross national product is less than \$200 a year and the average person is either a rural peasant or an urban peasant; where there is little infrastructure of roads, sewers, and so on; and where reliable bureaucratic institutions are lacking, needs a leader like Bismarck or Jerry Rawlings—the Ghanaian ruler who stabilized his country through dictatorship and then had himself elected democratically—in place for years before he is safe from an undisciplined soldiery.

Foreign correspondents in sub-Saharan Africa who equate democracy with progress miss this point, ignoring both history and centuries of political philosophy. They seem to think that the choice is between dictators and democrats. But for many places the only choice is between bad dictators and slightly better ones. To force elections on such places may give us some instant gratification. But after a few months or years a bunch of soldiers with grenades will get bored and greedy, and will easily topple their fledgling democracy. As likely as not, the democratic government will be composed of corrupt, bickering, ineffectual politicians whose weak rule never had an institutional base to start with: modern bureaucracies generally require high literacy rates over several generations. Even India, the great

A black and white photograph of a person in a field holding a large model airplane against a cloudy sky. The person is in the lower right corner, holding the wings of a large, detailed model airplane. The sky is filled with dramatic, swirling clouds, and the ground is dark and textured.

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the way is that all the secrets to the universe are
contained in the boundless reaches of the human mind.

Q **BOEING**



exception that proves the rule, has had a mixed record of success as a democracy, with Bihar and other poverty-racked places remaining in semi-anarchy. Ross Munro, a noted Asia expert, has documented how Chinese autocracy has better prepared China's population for the economic rigors of the post-industrial age than Indian democracy has prepared India's.

Of course, our post-Cold War mission to spread democracy is partly a pose. In Egypt and Saudi Arabia, America's most important allies in the energy-rich Muslim world, our worst nightmare would be free and fair elections, as it would be elsewhere in the Middle East. The end of the Cold War has changed our attitude toward those authoritarian regimes that are not crucial to our interests—but not toward those that are. We praise democracy, and meanwhile we are grateful for an autocrat like King Hussein, and for the fact that the Turkish and Pakistani militaries have always been the real powers behind the “democracies” in their countries. Obviously, democracy in the abstract encompasses undeniably good things such as civil society and a respect for human rights. But as a matter of public policy it has unfortunately come to focus on elections. What is in fact happening in many places requires a circuitous explanation.

The New Authoritarianism

THE battle between liberal and neoconservative moralists who are concerned with human rights and tragic realists who are concerned with security, balance-of-power politics, and economic matters (famously, Henry Kissinger) is a variation of a classic dispute between two great English philosophers—the twentieth-century liberal humanist Isaiah Berlin and the seventeenth-century monarchist and translator of Thucydides, Thomas Hobbes.

In May of 1953, while the ashes of the Nazi Holocaust were still smoldering and Stalin's grave was fresh, Isaiah Berlin delivered a spirited lecture against “historical inevitability”—the whole range of belief, advocated by Hobbes and others, according to which individuals and their societies are determined by their past, their civilization, and even their biology and environment. Berlin argued that adherence to historical inevitability, so disdainful of the very characteristics that make us human, led to Nazism and communism—both of them extreme attempts to force a direction onto history. Hobbes is just one of

many famous philosophers Berlin castigated in his lecture, but it is Hobbes's bleak and elemental philosophy that most conveniently sums up what Berlin and other moralists so revile. Hobbes suggested that even if human beings are nobler than apes, they are nevertheless governed by biology and environment. According to Hobbes, our ability to reason is both a mask for and a slave to our passions, our religions arise purely from fear, and theories about our divinity must be subordinate to the reality of how we behave. Enlightened despotism is thus preferable to democracy: the masses require protection from themselves. Hobbes, who lived through the debacle of parliamentary rule under Cromwell, published his translation of Thucydides in order, he said, to demonstrate how democracy, among other factors, was responsible for Athens's decline. Reflecting on ancient Athens, the philosopher James Harrington, a contemporary and follower of Hobbes, remarked that he could think of “nothing more dangerous” than “debate in a crowd.”

Though the swing toward democracy following the Cold War was a triumph for liberal philosophy, the pendulum will come to rest where it belongs—in the middle, between the ideals of Berlin and the realities of Hobbes. Where a political system leans too far in either direction, realignment or disaster awaits.

In 1993 Pakistan briefly enjoyed the most successful period of governance in its history. The government was neither democratic nor authoritarian but a cross between the two. The unelected Prime Minister, Moin Qureshi, was chosen by the President, who in turn was backed by the military. Because Qureshi had no voters to please, he made bold moves that restored political stability and economic growth. Before Qureshi there had been violence and instability under the elected governments of Benazir Bhutto and Nawaz Sharif. Bhutto's government was essentially an ethnic-Sindh mafia based in the south; Sharif's was an ethnic-Punjabi mafia from the geographic center. When Qureshi handed the country back to “the people,” elections returned Bhutto to power, and chaos resumed. Finally, in November of last year, Pakistan's military-backed President again deposed Bhutto. The sigh of relief throughout the country was audible. Recent elections brought Sharif, the Punjabi, back to power. He is governing better than the first time, but communal violence has returned to Pakistan's largest city, Karachi. I believe that Pakistan must find its way back to a hybrid regime like the one that worked so well in 1993; the other options are democratic anarchy and military tyranny. (Anarchy and tyranny, of course, are closely related: because power abhors a vacu-



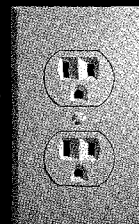
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um, the one necessarily leads to the other. One day in 1996 Kabul, the Afghan capital, was ruled essentially by no one; the next day it was ruled by Taliban, an austere religious movement.)

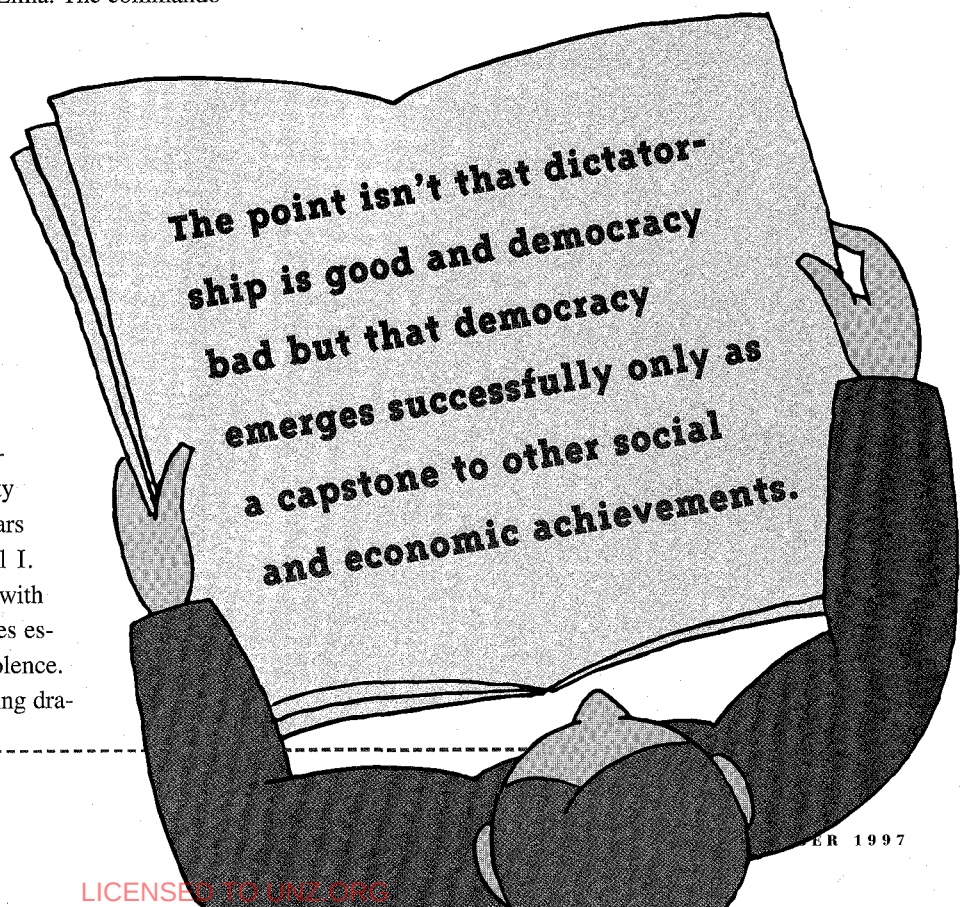
Turkey's situation is similar to Pakistan's. During the Cold War, Turkey's military intervened when democracy threatened mass violence, about once every decade. But Turkish coups are no longer tolerated by the West, so Turkey's military has had to work behind the scenes to keep civilian governments from acting too irrationally for our comfort and that of many secular Turks. As elected governments in Turkey become increasingly circumscribed by the army, a quieter military paternalism is likely to evolve in place of periodic coups. The crucial element is not the name the system goes by but how the system actually works.

Peru offers another version of subtle authoritarianism. In 1990 Peruvian voters elected Alberto Fujimori to dismantle parts of their democracy. He did, and as a consequence he restored a measure of civil society to Peru. Fujimori disbanded Congress and took power increasingly into his own hands, using it to weaken the Shining Path guerrilla movement, reduce inflation from 7,500 percent to 10 percent, and bring investment and jobs back to Peru. In 1995 Fujimori won re-election with three times as many votes as his nearest challenger. Fujimori's use of deception and corporate-style cost-benefit analyses allowed him to finesse brilliantly the crisis caused by the terrorist seizure of the Japanese embassy in Lima. The commando raid that killed the terrorists probably never could have taken place amid the chaotic conditions of the preceding Peruvian government. Despite the many problems Fujimori has had and still has, it is hard to argue that Peru has not benefited from his rule.

In many of these countries Hobbesian realities—in particular, too many young, violence-prone males without jobs—have necessitated radical action. In a York University study published last year the scholars Christian G. Mesquida and Neil I. Wiener demonstrate how countries with young populations (young poor males especially) are subject to political violence. With Third World populations growing dra-

matically (albeit at slowing rates) and becoming increasingly urbanized, democrats must be increasingly ingenious and dictators increasingly tyrannical in order to rule successfully. Surveillance, too, will become more important on an urbanized planet; it is worth noting that the etymology of the word "police" is *polis*, Greek for "city." Because tottering democracies and despotic militaries frighten away the investors required to create jobs for violence-prone youths, more hybrid regimes will perforce emerge. They will call themselves democracies, and we may go along with the lie—but, as in Peru, the regimes will be decisively autocratic. (Hobbes wrote that Thucydides "praiseth the government of Athens, when . . . it was democratical in name, but in effect monarchical under Pericles." Polybius, too, recommended mixed regimes as the only stable form of government.) Moreover, if a shortage of liquidity affects world capital markets by 2000, as Klaus Schwab, the president of the World Economic Forum, and other experts fear may happen, fiercer competition among developing nations for scarcer investment money will accelerate the need for efficient neo-authoritarian governments.

The current reality in Singapore and South Africa, for instance, shreds our democratic certainties. Lee Kuan Yew's offensive neo-authoritarianism, in which the state has evolved into a corporation that is paternalistic, meritocratic, and decidedly undemocratic, has forged prosperity from abject poverty. A survey of business





executives and economists by the World Economic Forum ranked Singapore No. 1 among the fifty-three most advanced countries appearing on an index of global competitiveness. What is good for business executives is often good for the average citizen: per capita wealth in Singapore is nearly equal to that in Canada, the nation that ranks No. 1 in the world on the United Nations' Human Development Index. When Lee took over Singapore, more than thirty years ago, it was a mosquito-ridden bog filled with slum quarters that frequently lacked both plumbing and electricity. Doesn't liberation from filth and privation count as a human right? Jeffrey Sachs, a professor of international trade at Harvard, writes that "good government" means relative safety from corruption, from breach of contract, from property expropriation, and from bureaucratic inefficiency. Singapore's reputation in these regards is unsurpassed. If Singapore's 2.8 million citizens ever demand democracy, they will just prove the assertion that prosperous middle classes arise under authoritarian regimes before gaining the confidence to dislodge their benefactors. Singapore's success is frightening, yet it must be acknowledged.

Democratic South Africa, meanwhile, has become one of the most violent places on earth that are not war zones, according to the security firm Kroll Associates. The murder rate is six times that in the United States, five times that in Russia. There are ten private-security guards for every policeman. The currency has substantially declined, educated people continue to flee, and international drug cartels have made the country a new transshipment center. Real unemployment is about 33 percent, and is probably much higher among youths. Jobs cannot be created without the cooperation of foreign investors, but assuaging their fear could require the kind of union-busting and police actions that democracy will not permit. The South African military was the power behind the regime in the last decade of apartheid. And it is the military that may yet help to rule South Africa in the future. Like Pakistan but more so, South Africa is destined for a hybrid regime if it is to succeed. The abundant coverage of South Africa's impressive attempts at coming to terms with the crimes of apartheid serves to obscure the country's growing problems. There is a sense of fear in such celebratory, backward-looking coverage, as if writing too much about difficulties in that racially symbolic country would expose the limits of the liberal humanist enterprise worldwide.

Burma, too, may be destined for a hybrid regime, despite the deification of the opposition leader and Nobel Peace laureate Aung San Suu Kyi by Western journalists.

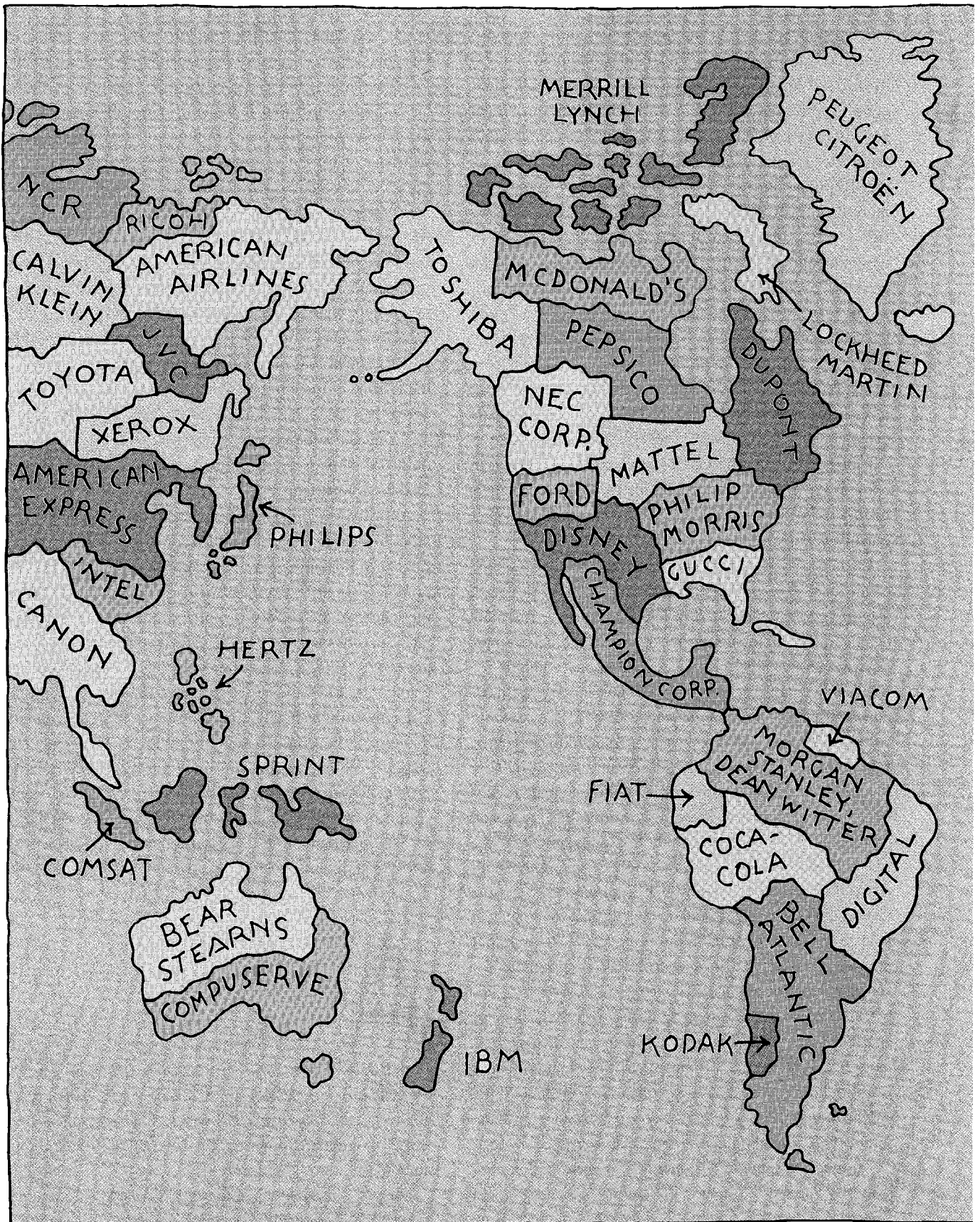
While the United States calls for democracy in and economic sanctions against Burma, those with more immediate clout—that is, Burma's Asian neighbors, and especially corporate-oligarchic militaries like Thailand's—show no compunction about increasing trade links with Burma's junta. Aung San Suu Kyi may one day bear the title of leader of Burma, but only with the tacit approval of a co-governing military. Otherwise Burma will not be stable. A rule of thumb is that governments are determined not by what liberal humanists wish but rather by what business people and others require. Various democratic revolutions failed in Europe in 1848 because what the intellectuals wanted was not what the emerging middle classes wanted. For quite a few parts of today's world, which have at best only the beginnings of a middle class, the Europe of the mid nineteenth century provides a closer comparison than the Europe of the late twentieth century. In fact, for the poorest countries where we now recommend democracy, Cromwell's England may provide the best comparison.

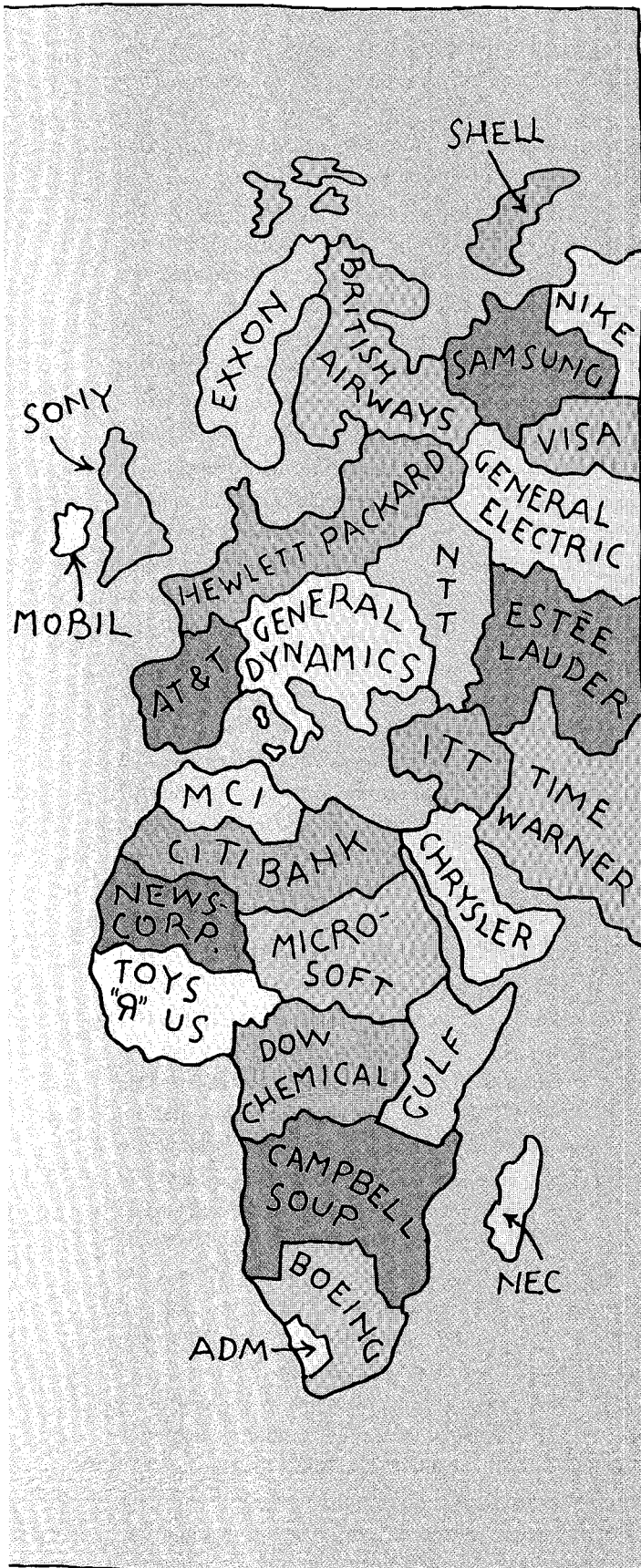
As with the Christian religion (whose values are generally different for Americans than for Bosnian Serbs or for Lebanese Phalangists, to take only three examples), the nominal system of a government is less significant than the nature of the society in which it operates. And as democracy sinks into the soils of various local cultures, it often leaves less-than-nourishing deposits. "Democracy" in Cambodia, for instance, began evolving into something else almost immediately after the UN-sponsored elections there, in 1993. Hun Sen, one of two Prime Ministers in a fragile coalition, lived in a fortified bunker from which he physically threatened journalists and awarded government contracts in return for big bribes. His coup last summer, which toppled his co-Prime Minister and ended the democratic experiment, should have come as no surprise.

"World Government"

AUTHORITARIAN or hybrid regimes, no matter how illiberal, will still be treated as legitimate if they can provide security for their subjects and spark economic growth. And they will easily find acceptance in a world driven increasingly by financial markets that know no borders.

For years idealists have dreamed of a "world government." Well, a world government has been emerging—





quietly and organically, the way vast developments in history take place. I do not refer to the United Nations, the power of which, almost by definition, affects only the poorest countries. After its peacekeeping failures in Bosnia and Somalia—and its \$2 billion failure to make Cambodia democratic—the UN is on its way to becoming a supranational relief agency. Rather, I refer to the increasingly dense ganglia of international corporations and markets that are becoming the unseen arbiters of power in many countries. It is much more important nowadays for the leader of a developing country to get a hearing before corporate investors at the World Economic Forum than to speak before the UN General Assembly. Amnesty International now briefs corporations, just as it has always briefed national governments. Interpol officials have spoken about sharing certain kinds of intelligence with corporations. The Prime Minister of Malaysia, Mahathir Mohamad, is recognizing the real new world order (at least in this case) by building a low-tax district he calls a “multimedia super-corridor,” with two new cities and a new airport designed specifically for international corporations. The world’s most efficient peacemaking force belongs not to the UN or even to the great powers but to a South African corporate mercenary force called Executive Outcomes, which restored relative stability to Sierra Leone in late 1995. (This is reminiscent of the British East India Company, which raised armies transparently for economic interests.) Not long after Executive Outcomes left Sierra Leone, where only 20.7 percent of adults can read, that country’s so-called model democracy crumbled into military anarchy, as Sudan’s model democracy had done in the late 1980s.

Of the world’s hundred largest economies, fifty-one are not countries but corporations. While the 200 largest corporations employ less than three fourths of one percent of the world’s work force, they account for 28 percent of world economic activity. The 500 largest corporations account for 70 percent of world trade. Corporations are like the feudal domains that evolved into nation-states; they are nothing less than the vanguard of a new Darwinian organization of politics. Because they are in the forefront of real globalization while the overwhelming majority of the world’s inhabitants are still rooted in local terrain, corporations will be free for a few decades to leave behind the social and environmental wreckage they create—abruptly closing a factory here in order to open an unsafe facility with a cheaper work force there. Ultimately, as technological innovations continue to accelerate and the world’s middle classes come closer together, corporations may well become more responsible to the cohering global com-



munity and less amoral in the course of their evolution toward new political and cultural forms.

For instance, ABB Asea Brown Boveri Ltd. is a \$36 billion-a-year multinational corporation divided into 1,300 companies in 140 countries; no one national group accounts for more than 20 percent of its employees. ABB's chief executive officer, Percy Barnevik, recently told an interviewer that this diversity is so that ABB can develop its own "global ABB culture—you might say an umbrella culture." Barnevik explains that his best managers are moved around periodically so that they and their families can develop "global personalities" by living and growing up in different countries. ABB management teams, moreover, are never composed of employees from any one country. Barnevik says that this encourages a "cross-cultural glue." Unlike the multiculturalism of the left, which masks individual deficiencies through collective—that is, ethnic or racial—self-esteem, a multinational corporation like ABB has created a diverse multicultural environment in which individuals rise or fall completely on their own merits. Like the hybrid regimes of the present and future, such an evolving corporate community can bear an eerie resemblance to the oligarchies of the ancient world. "Decentralization goes hand in hand with central monitoring," Barnevik says.

The level of social development required by democracy as it is known in the West has existed in only a minority of places—and even there only during certain periods of history. We are entering a troubling transition, and the irony is that while we preach our version of democracy abroad, it slips away from us at home.

I *The Shrinking Domain of "Politics"*

PUT special emphasis on corporations because of the true nature of politics: who does and who doesn't have power. To categorize accurately the political system of a given society, one must define the significant elements of power within it. Supreme Court Justice Louis Brandeis knew this instinctively, which is why he railed against corporate monopolies. Of course, the influence that corporations wield over government and the economy is so vast and obvious that the point needs no elaboration. But there are other, more covert forms of emerging corporate power.

The number of residential communities with defended perimeters that have been built by corporations went from

1,000 in the early 1960s to more than 80,000 by the mid-1980s, with continued dramatic increases in the 1990s. ("Gated communities" are not an American invention. They are an import from Latin America, where deep social divisions in places like Rio de Janeiro and Mexico City make them necessary for the middle class.) Then there are malls, with their own rules and security forces, as opposed to public streets; private health clubs as opposed to public playgrounds; incorporated suburbs with strict zoning; and other mundane aspects of daily existence in which—perhaps without realizing it, because the changes have been so gradual—we opt out of the public sphere and the "social contract" for the sake of a protected setting. Dennis Judd, an urban-affairs expert at the University of Missouri at St. Louis, told me recently, "It's nonsense to think that Americans are individualists. Deep down we are a nation of herd animals: micelike conformists who will lay at our doorstep many of our rights if someone tells us that we won't have to worry about crime and our property values are secure. We have always put up with restrictions inside a corporation which we would never put up with in the public sphere. But what many do not realize is that life within some sort of corporation is what the future will increasingly be about."

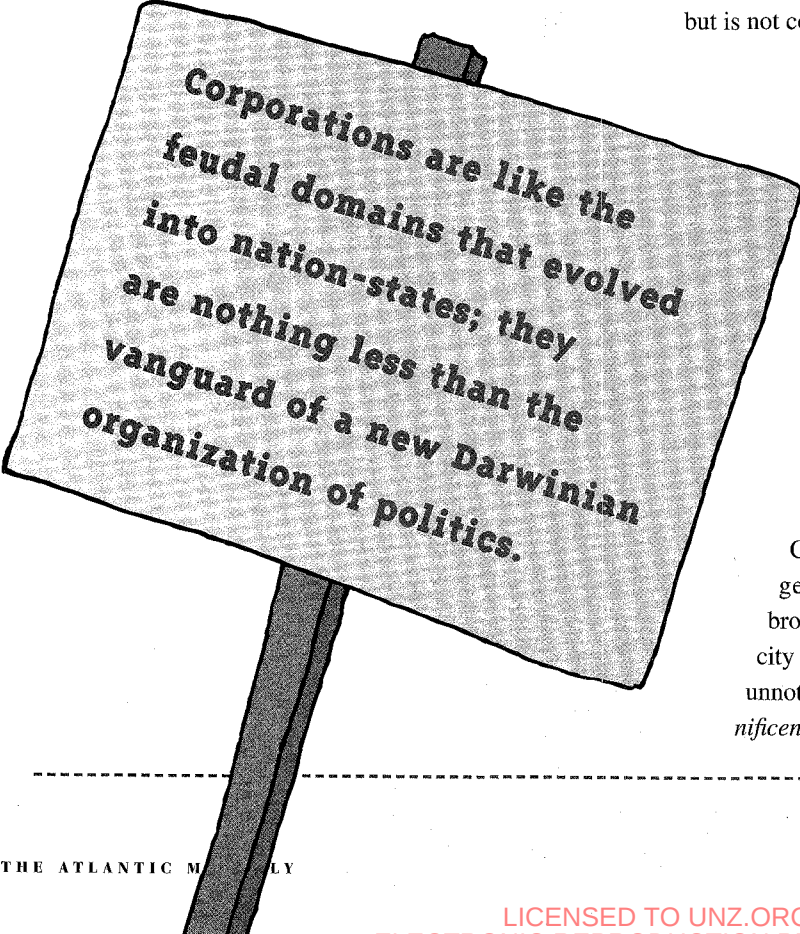
Indeed, a number of American cities are re-emerging as Singapores, with corporate enclaves that are dedicated to global business and defended by private security firms adjacent to heavily zoned suburbs. For instance, in my travels I have looked for St. Louis and Atlanta and not found them. I found only hotels and corporate offices with generic architecture, "nostalgic" tourist bubbles, zoned suburbs, and bleak urban wastelands; there was nothing distinctive that I could label "St. Louis" or "Atlanta." Last year's Olympics in Atlanta will most likely be judged by future historians as the first of the postmodern era, because of the use of social façades to obscure fragmentation. Peace and racial harmony were continually proclaimed to be Olympic themes—even though whites and blacks in Atlanta live in separate enclaves and the downtown is a fortress of office blocks whose streets empty at dusk. During the games a virtual army was required to protect visitors from terrorism, as at previous Olympics, and also from random crime. All this seems normal. It is both wonderful and frightening how well we adapt.

Universities, too, are being redefined by corporations. I recently visited Omaha, where the corporate community made it possible for the Omaha branch of the University of Nebraska to build an engineering school—even after the Board of Regents vetoed the project. Local corporations, particularly First Data Resources, wanted the school, so

they worked with the Omaha branch of the university to finance what became less a school than a large information-science and engineering complex. "This is the future," said the chancellor of the Omaha campus, Del Weber. "Universities will have to become entrepreneurs, working with corporations *on curriculum* [emphasis mine] and other matters, or they will die." The California state university system, in particular the San Diego campus, is perhaps the best example of corporate-academic synergy, in which a school rises in prestige because its curriculum has practical applications for nearby technology firms.

Corporations, which are anchored neither to nations nor to communities, have created strip malls, edge cities, and Disneyesque tourist bubbles. Developments are not necessarily bad: they provide low prices, convenience, efficient work forces, and, in the case of tourist bubbles, safety. We need big corporations. Our society has reached a level of social and technological complexity at which goods and services must be produced for a price and to a standard that smaller businesses cannot manage. We should also recognize, though, that the architectural reconfiguration of our cities and towns has been an undemocratic event—with decisions in effect handed down from above by an assembly of corporate experts.

"The government of man will be replaced by
the administration of things,"
the Enlightenment
French



Corporations are like the
feudal domains that evolved
into nation-states; they
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organization of politics.

philosopher Henri de Saint-Simon prophesied. We should worry that experts will channel our very instincts and thereby control them to some extent. For example, while the government fights drug abuse, often with pathetic results, pharmaceutical corporations have worked *through* the government and political parties to receive sanction for drugs such as stimulants and anti-depressants, whose consciousness-altering effects, it could be argued, are as great as those of outlawed drugs.

The more appliances that middle-class existence requires, the more influence their producers have over the texture of our lives. Of course, the computer in some ways enhances the power of the individual, but it also depletes our individuality. A degree of space and isolation is required for a healthy sense of self, which may be threatened by the constant stream of other people's opinions on computer networks.

Democratic governance, at the federal, state, and local levels, goes on. But its ability to affect our lives is limited. The growing piles of our material possessions make personal life more complex and leave less time for communal matters. And as communities become liberated from geography, as well as more specialized culturally and electronically, they will increasingly fall outside the realm of traditional governance. Democracy loses meaning if both rulers and ruled cease to be part of a community tied to a specific territory. In this historical transition phase, lasting perhaps a century or more, in which globalization has begun but is not complete and loyalties are highly confused, civil

society will be harder to maintain. How and when we vote during the next hundred years may be a minor detail for historians.

True, there are strong similarities between now and a century ago. In the 1880s and 1890s America experienced great social and economic upheaval. The combination of industrialization and urbanization shook the roots of religious and family life: sects sprouted, racist Populists ranted, and single women, like Theodore Dreiser's Sister Carrie, went to work in filthy factories. Racial tensions hardened as the Jim Crow system took hold across the South. "Gadgets" like the light bulb and the automobile brought an array of new choices and stresses. "The city was so big, now, that people disappeared into it unnoticed," Booth Tarkington lamented in *The Magnificent Ambersons*.

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Our culture is obsessed with waste. The culture we speak of is not only our company culture, but a useful little culture of bacteria and fungi. These voracious bugs clean up oily waste through a process called bioremediation. We've been using it in many places. Truthfully, nature has always degraded substances this way. We just speed the process and make it more efficient. We combine air, water, a bulking agent like straw, fertilizer to nourish 'native' bacteria, and oily waste. After turning and mixing, the microbes eat the oil and leave behind rich compost. In nature, this process may take years or even decades. By optimizing environmental conditions for the microbes and revving up their metabolisms, it can take only a couple of months. What's left is a topsoil mixture we've safely used for revegetation of old oil and gas well sites. It's true that oil exploration can sometimes result in undesirable by-products and the need for site reclamation. By enlisting nature's help, we're solving both problems. And while cleaning up after ourselves is often required by law, we've always felt that it makes good business sense. If we can do it within the natural order of things, then to us that makes the most sense of all.

Oily sludge was transformed into plantable compost that was spread around an old drilling site, then contoured to match the landscape. We planted a seed mixture of Sand Love Grass and Little Blue Stem. Not only did it thrive, but the area became a habitat for wildlife.



People Do.

A hundred years ago millionaires' mansions arose beside slums. The crass accumulation of wealth by a relatively small number of people gave the period its name—the Gilded Age, after a satire by Mark Twain and Charles Dudley Warner about financial and political malfeasance. Around the turn of the century 12 percent of all American households controlled about 86 percent of the country's wealth.

But there is a difference, and not just one of magnitude. The fortunes made from the 1870s through the 1890s by John D. Rockefeller, Andrew Carnegie, J. P. Morgan, and others were *American* fortunes, anchored to a specific geographic space. The Gilded Age millionaires financed an economy of scale to fit the vast landscape that Abraham Lincoln had secured by unifying the nation in the 1860s. These millionaires funded libraries and universities and founded symphony orchestras and historical societies to consolidate their own civilization in the making. Today's fortunes are being made in a global economic environment in which an affluent global civilization and power structure are being forged even as a large stratum of our society remains rooted in place. A few decades hence it may be hard to define an "American" city.

Even J. P. Morgan was limited by the borders of the nation-state. But in the future who, or what, will limit the likes of Disney chairman Michael Eisner? The UN? Eisner and those like him are not just representatives of the "free" market. Neither the Founders nor any of the early modern philosophers ever envisioned that the free market would

lead to the concentration of power and resources that many corporate executives already embody. Whereas the liberal mistake is to think that there is a program or policy to alleviate every problem in the world, the conservative flaw is to be vigilant against concentrations of power in government only—not in the private sector, where power can be wielded more secretly and sometimes more dangerously.

Umpire Regimes

THIS rise of corporate power occurs more readily as the masses become more indifferent and the elite less accountable. Material possessions not only focus people toward private and away from communal life but also encourage docility. The more possessions one has, the more compromises one will make to protect them. The ancient Greeks said that the slave is someone who is intent on filling his belly, which can also mean someone who is intent on safeguarding his possessions. Aristophanes and Euripides, the late-eighteenth-century Scottish philosopher Adam Ferguson, and Tocqueville in the nineteenth century all warned that material prosperity would breed servility and withdrawal, turning people into, in Tocqueville's words, "industrious sheep."

In moderate doses, apathy is not necessarily harmful. I

GIRDLING

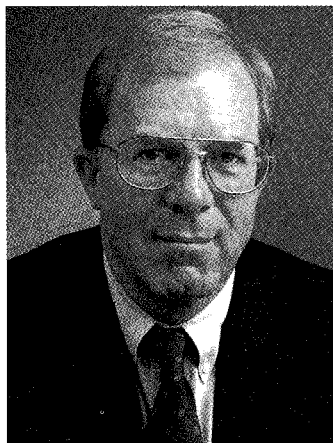
Quicker than the felling of trees,
a single ringing of the bark
above ground opened a wild grove
the first summer of settlement.
As buds dried up, the sap stream cut,
sun touched virgin forest floor.
Corn planted in hills not rows stretched
faster than briars or weeds. Feeding
on centuries of leafmold the stalks
reached up among the dying limbs
before tasseling. By Dog Days
the girdled acres brimmed with corn

and nettles, honeysuckle vines.
By the next spring rotting twig ends
and little branches peppered down
on the plowed ground. And by the third
year whole sheaths of bark dropped like shields
of a defeated army on
the hearth of cultivation. In five
years the standing trunks looked like stones
and statues in a graveyard as
crops rose and fell with the seasons.
In a decade the woods were gone.

—ROBERT MORGAN

As Americans' Health Care Needs Change, So Change the Blues

Like the auto, defense and banking industries before it, today's health care industry is undergoing a massive transformation. In just 15 years, this country has experienced a revolutionary change in how we deliver and pay for health care services. For the first time in history, we



By Patrick G. Hays, President and Chief Executive Officer, Blue Cross and Blue Shield Association

are aligning the incentives of physicians, hospitals and health plans toward the united goal of improving health care quality. At the same time, we have introduced sound business principles into a market that involves the most personal of services.

The idea that economics, competition and market forces can be applied to such a personal business has generated tremendous criticism in recent months. But our nation's health care purchasers have spoken: Managed care in some form or another is here to stay. And recent advances in improving health outcomes demonstrate that the market can indeed spawn innovation and creativity.

This revolution means that today's insurance environment is no longer simply a system of cost-based reimbursement and passive financing. It is a thriving marketplace where health care companies compete on quality and price. But this dramatic shift has also created an increased need for additional capital—capital that is necessary to form integrated delivery partnerships with health care providers; to develop sophisticated information systems; to expand operations and achieve economies of scale; and to create new systems of care that improve efficiency and coordination of health services, especially for the chronically ill.

Health plans also need capital to support clinical advances that offer hope for previously untreatable illnesses and injuries. Our physician and hospital partners are helping patients benefit from remarkable breakthroughs in high-technology medicine—including new drugs, devices and diagnostic software. Covering the cost of these new technologies forces health plans to seek out new revenue sources.

In many ways, this market transformation affects the Blue Cross and Blue Shield System more keenly than our competitors. The new market forces have brought with them a great deal of public confusion about what role the Blues will play in the new health care environment. Indeed, there is no other health care entity that competes on more market fronts than our unique System of Plans. Moreover, no other brand generates the goodwill so many Americans associate with the Blue names and logos.

Today's Blues are collectively the nation's largest managed care providers, with more than 39 million customers—59 percent of total membership—enrolled in

HMOs, PPOs and point-of-service plans. Keeping pace with the relentless competition in the managed care marketplace has required many Blues Plans to re-invent themselves. Today there are 56 independent Blue Cross and Blue Shield Plans, compared to 128 in 1975.

Blues Plans are forming innovative partnerships with local health care providers; creating new, customized products for individual consumers; expanding into new health care markets; and joining forces with other companies, both Blue and non-Blue. Each of these decisions is a local one, based on how the Plan believes it can best provide its existing and future customers with high-quality, affordable health care services.

These changes in the structure of the Blues can be confusing or even scary for our customers. We realize that it may take a while for people to become comfortable with the new health care era. But we are committed to being the premier health care service plans in the United States. We remain dedicated to serving our subscribers and ensuring that our brands represent quality, dependability, choice and nationwide acceptance. We are willing to do what it takes to maintain this pledge—even if it means restructuring like our competitors.

We believe that corporate design and structure are just tools of governance and management. Although changes in corporate form can cause confusion for the public, not all changes in corporate form are alike, and changes are made in the best interests of consumers.

In order to effectively serve our customers, Blues Plans must be able to compete on nothing less than a level playing field. If and how a Plan reorganizes depends on its goals, strategic future, regulatory requirements and capital market demands. Like our competitors, we must be able to meet customer demands for high quality, geographic access and affordable prices.

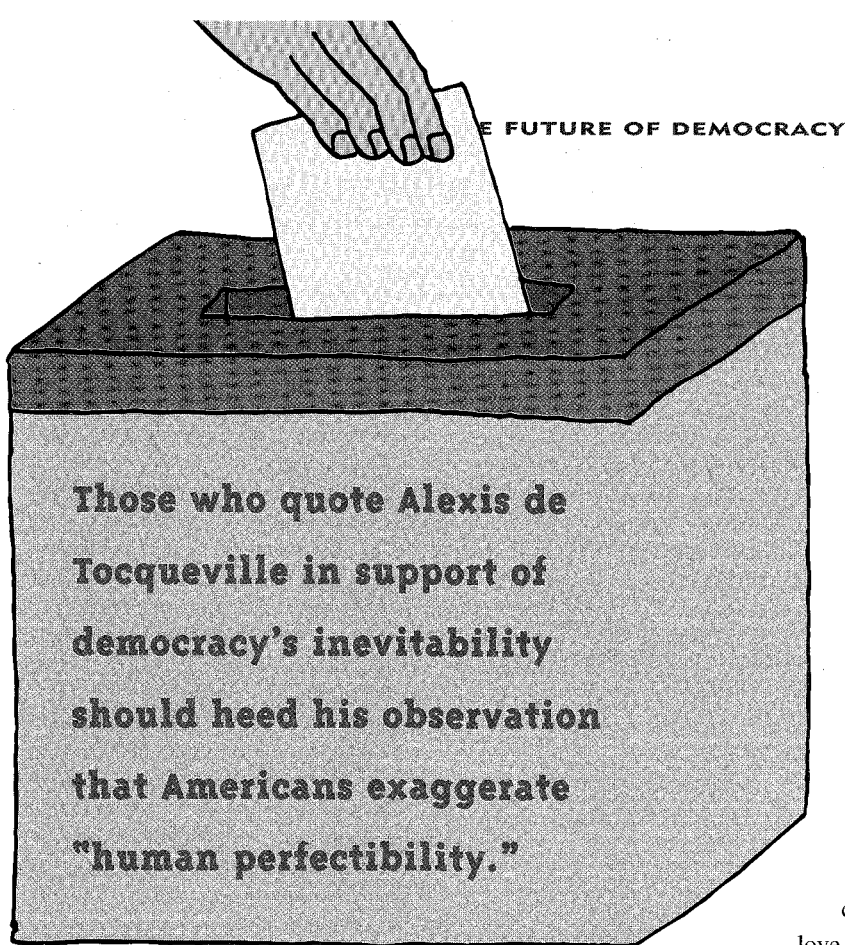
In these dramatically changing times, old rules and ideas are being swept aside by new realities. By redesigning our health care system, we are participating in one of the greatest social experiments in American history—probably the most profound social experiment this country has undertaken since it became an industrialized nation.

The rapid state of change in health care is painful—for those inside it and for many who need it. Finding ways to finance the new health care paradigm is a tremendous challenge. But we are firm in our belief that today's evolving marketplace sets the stage for a new era of competition in health care: Competition among organized delivery systems, involving informed consumers making educated choices, with health plans competing to provide superior patient outcomes and demonstrated customer value.

If we succeed in creating truly aligned incentives among all the players in the health care marketplace, we will restore public trust in health care in America—and we will benefit those who need care the most.

For more information about your local Blue Plan, call 1.800.244.BLUE, or visit www.bluecares.com.

This advertisement is sponsored by the Blue Cross and Blue Shield Association, an association of independent Blue Cross and Blue Shield Plans



have lived and traveled in countries with both high voter turnouts and unstable politics; the low voter turnouts in the United States do not by themselves worry me. The philosopher James Harrington observed that the very indifference of most people allows for a calm and healthy political climate. Apathy, after all, often means that the political situation is healthy enough to be ignored. The last thing America needs is more voters—particularly badly educated and alienated ones—with a passion for politics. But when voter turnout decreases to around 50 percent at the same time that the middle class is spending astounding sums in gambling casinos and state lotteries, joining private health clubs, and using large amounts of stimulants and anti-depressants, one can legitimately be concerned about the state of American society.

I recently went to a basketball game at the University of Arizona. It was just a scrimmage, not even a varsity game. Yet the stadium was jammed, and three groups of cheerleaders performed. Season tickets were almost impossible to obtain, even before the team won the national championship. Donating \$10,000 to \$15,000 to the university puts one in a good position to accumulate enough points to be eligible for a season ticket, though someone could donate up to \$100,000 and still not qualify. I have heard that which spouse gets to keep tickets can be a primary issue in Tucson divorce cases. I noticed that almost everyone in the stands

was white; almost everyone playing was black. Gladiators in Rome were almost always of racial or ethnic groups different from the Romans. "There may be so little holding these southwestern communities together that a basketball team is all there is," a Tucson newspaper editor told me. "It's a sports team, a symphony orchestra, and a church rolled into one." Since neither Tucson nor any other southwestern city with a big state university can find enough talent locally, he pointed out, community self-esteem becomes a matter of which city can find the largest number of talented blacks from far away to represent it.

We have become voyeurs and escapists. Many of us don't play sports but love watching great athletes with great physical attributes. The fact that basketball and foot-

ball and baseball have become big corporate business

has only increased the popularity of spectator sports. Basketball in particular—so fluid, and with the players in revealing shorts and tank tops—provides the artificial excitement that mass existence "against instinct," as the philosopher Bertrand Russell labeled our lives, requires.

Take the new kind of professional fighting, called "extreme fighting," that has been drawing sellout crowds across the country. Combining boxing, karate, and wrestling, it has nothing fake about it—blood really flows. City and state courts have tried, often unsuccessfully, to stop it. The spectators interviewed in a CNN documentary on the new sport all appeared to be typical lower-middle and middle-class people, many of whom brought young children to the fights. Asked why they came, they said that they wanted to "see blood." The mood of the Colosseum goes together with the age of the corporation, which offers entertainment in place of values. The Nobel laureate Czeslaw Milosz provides the definitive view on why Americans degrade themselves with mass culture: "Today man believes that there is *nothing* in him, so he accepts *anything*, even if he knows it to be bad, in order to find himself at one with others, in order not to be alone." Of course, it is because people find so little in themselves that they fill their world with celebrities. The masses avoid important national and international news because much of it is tragic, even as they show an unlimited appetite for the details of Princess



Diana's death. This willingness to give up self and responsibility is the sine qua non for tyranny.

The classicist Sir Moses Finley ended his austere and penetrating work *Politics in the Ancient World* (1983) with these words:

The ideology of a ruling class is of little use unless it is accepted by those who are being ruled, and so it was to an extraordinary degree in Rome. Then, when the ideology began to disintegrate within the elite itself, the consequence was not to broaden the political liberty among the citizenry but, on the contrary, to destroy it for everyone.

So what about our ruling class?

I was an expatriate for many years. Most expatriates I knew had utopian liberal beliefs that meant little, since few of them had much of a real stake in any nation. Their patriotism was purely nostalgic: a French friend would become tearful when her national anthem was played, but whenever she returned to France, she complained nonstop about the French. Increasingly, though, one can be an expatriate without living abroad. One can have Oriental rugs, foreign cuisines, eclectic tastes, exposure to foreign languages, friends overseas with whom one's life increasingly intertwines, and special schools for the kids—all at home. Resident expatriatism, or something resembling it, could become the new secular religion of the upper-middle and upper classes, fostered by communications technology. Just as religion was replaced by nationalism at the end of the Middle Ages, at the end of modern times nationalism might gradually be replaced by a combination of traditional religion, spiritualism, patriotism directed toward the planet rather than a specific country, and assorted other organized emotions. Resident expatriates might constitute an elite with limited geographic loyalty beyond their local communities, which provide them with a convenient and aesthetically pleasing environment.

An elite with little loyalty to the state and a mass society fond of gladiator entertainments form a society in which corporate Leviathans rule and democracy is hollow. James Madison in *The Federalist* considered a comparable situation. Madison envisioned an enormously spread-out nation, but he never envisioned a modern network of transportation that would allow us psychologically to inhabit the same national community. Thus his vision of a future United States was that of a vast geographic space with governance but without patriotism, in which the state would be a mere "umpire," refereeing among competing interests. Regional, religious, and communal self-concern would bring about over-

all stability. This concept went untested, because a cohesive American identity and culture did take root. But as Americans enter a global community, and as class and racial divisions solidify, Madison's concept is relevant anew.

There is something postmodern about this scenario, with its blend of hollow governance and fragmentation, and something ancient, too. Because of suburbanization, American communities will be increasingly segregated by race and class. The tendency both toward compromise and toward trusting institutions within a given community will be high, as in small and moderately sized European countries today, or as in ancient Greek city-states. Furthermore, prosperous suburban sprawls such as western St. Louis and western Omaha, and high-technology regions such as the Tucson-Phoenix corridor, North Carolina's Research Triangle, and the Portland-Seattle-Vancouver area will compete with one another and with individual cities and states for overseas markets, as North America becomes a more peaceful and productive version of chaotic, warring city-state Greece.

A continental regime must continue to function, because America's edge in information warfare requires it, both to maintain and to lead a far-flung empire of sorts, as the Athenians did during the Peloponnesian War. But trouble awaits us, if only because the "triumph" of democracy in the developing world will cause great upheavals before many places settle into more practical—and, it is to be hoped, benign—hybrid regimes. In the Middle East, for instance, countries like Syria, Iraq, and the Gulf sheikhdoms—with artificial borders, rising populations, and rising numbers of working-age youths—will not instantly become stable democracies once their absolute dictators and medieval ruling families pass from the scene. As in the early centuries of Christianity, there will be a mess.

Given the surging power of corporations, the gladiator culture of the masses, and the ability of the well-off to be partly disengaged from their own countries, what will democracy under an umpire regime be like?

The Return of Oligarchy?

SURPRISINGLY, the Founders admired the military regime of Sparta. Only in this century has Sparta been seen as the forerunner of a totalitarian state. Why shouldn't men like Madison and George Washington have admired Sparta? Its division of power among two Kings, the elders,



and the *ephors* ("overseers") approximated the system of checks and balances that the Founders desired in order to prevent the emergence of another Cromwell. Of course, Sparta, like Athens, was a two-tiered system, with an oligarchic element that debated and decided issues and a mass—*helots* ("serfs") in Sparta, and slaves and immigrants in Athens—that had few or no rights. Whether Sparta was a monarchy, an oligarchy, or a limited democracy—and whether Athens was oligarchic or democratic—still depends on one's viewpoint. According to Aristotle, "Whether the few or the many rule is accidental to oligarchy and democracy—the rich are few everywhere, the poor many." The real difference, he wrote, is that "oligarchy is to the advantage of the rich, democracy to the advantage of the poor." By "poor" Aristotle meant laborers, landowning peasants, artisans, and so on—essentially, the middle class and below.

Is it not conceivable that corporations will, like the rulers of both Sparta and Athens, project power to the advantage of the well-off while satisfying the twenty-first-century servile populace with the equivalent of bread and circuses? In other words, the category of politics we live with may depend more on power relationships and the demeanor of our society than on whether we continue to hold elections. Just as Cambodia was never really democratic, despite what the State Department and the UN told us, in the future we may not be democratic, despite what the government and media increasingly dominated by corporations tell us.

Indeed, the differences between oligarchy and democracy and between ancient democracy and our own could be far subtler than we think. Modern democracy exists within a thin band of social and economic conditions, which include flexible hierarchies that allow people to move up and down the ladder. Instead of clear-cut separations between classes there are many gray shades, with most people bunched in the middle. Democracy is a fraud in many poor countries outside this narrow band: Africans want a better life and instead have been given the right to vote. As new and intimidating forms of economic and social stratification appear in a world based increasingly on the ability to handle and analyze large quantities of information, a new politics might emerge for us, too—less like the kind envisioned by progressive reformers and more like the pragmatic hybrid regimes that are bringing prosperity to developing countries.

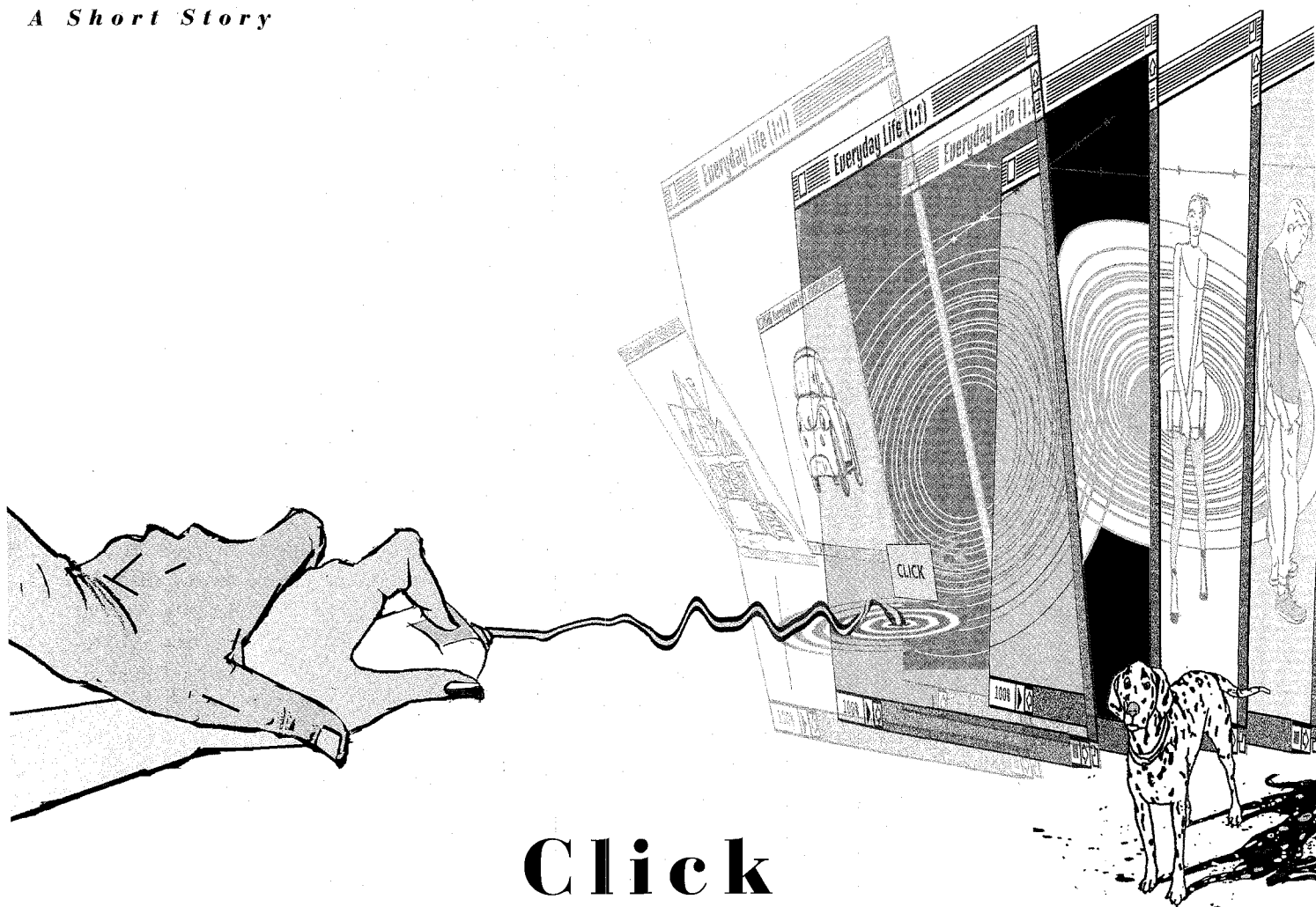
The classicist Sir Moses Finley has noted that what really separated the rulers from the ruled in the ancient world was literacy: the illiterate masses were subject to the elite's

interpretation of documents. Analogous gulfs between rulers and ruled may soon emerge, not only because of differing abilities to process information and to master technology but also because of globalization itself. Already, barely literate Mexicans on the U.S. border, working in dangerous, Dickensian conditions to produce our VCRs, jeans, and toasters, earn less than 50 cents an hour, with no rights or benefits. Is that Western democracy or ancient-Greek-style oligarchy?

As the size of the U.S. population and the complexity of American life spill beyond the traditional national community, creating a new world of city-states and suburbs, the distance will grow between the citizens of the new city-states and the bureaucratic class of overseers in Washington. Those overseers will manage an elite volunteer military armed with information-age weapons, in a world made chaotic by the spread of democracy and its attendant neo-authoritarian heresies. We prevented the worst excesses of a "military-industrial complex" by openly fearing it, as President Dwight Eisenhower told us to do. It may be equally wise to fear a high-tech military complex today.

Precisely because the technological future in North America will provide so much market and individual freedom, this productive anarchy will require the supervision of tyrannies—or else there will be no justice for anyone. Liberty, after all, is inseparable from authority, as Henry Kissinger observed in *A World Restored: Metternich, Castlereagh, and the Problems of Peace 1812–1822* (1957). A hybrid regime may await us all. The future of the Third World may finally be our own.

And that brings us to a sober realization. If democracy, the crowning political achievement of the West, is gradually being transfigured, in part because of technology, then the West will suffer the same fate as earlier civilizations. Just as Rome believed it was giving final expression to the republican ideal of the Greeks, and just as medieval Kings believed they were giving final expression to the Roman ideal, we believe, as the early Christians did, that we are bringing freedom and a better life to the rest of humankind. But as the nineteenth-century Russian liberal intellectual Alexander Herzen wrote, "Modern Western thought will pass into history and be incorporated in it . . . just as our body will pass into the composition of grass, of sheep, of cutlets, and of men." I do not mean to say that the United States is in decline. On the contrary, at the end of the twentieth century we are the very essence of creativity and dynamism. We are poised to transform ourselves into something perhaps quite different from what we imagine. ☞



Click

by JOHN BARTH

They've just rolled out of the sack (one of them perhaps more reluctantly than the other) from an extended session of makeup sex after an extended lovers' quarrel, the most serious of their coupleship—a quarrel currently truced but by no means yet resolved and maybe inherently unresolvable, although they're working on it

C LICK?"

So (sans question mark) reads the computer monitor when, in time, "Fred" and "Irma" haul themselves out of bed, wash up a bit, slip back into their undies, and—still nuzzling, patting, chuckling, sighing—go to check their E-mail on Fred's already booted-up machine. Just that single uppercase imperative verb or sound-noun floating mid-screen, where normally the desktop would appear, with its icons of their several files: HERS, HIS, SYSTEM, APPLICATIONS, FINANCES, HOUSE STUFF, INTERNET, and ETC (their catchall file). Surprised Irma, having pressed a key to disperse the screen-saver program and repeated aloud the word

that oddly then appeared, calls Fred over to check it out, but the house cybercoach is as puzzled thereby as she. Since the thing's onscreen, however, and framed in a bordered box, they take it to be a command or an invitation—anyhow an option button, like SAVE or CANCEL, not merely the name of the sound that their computer mouse makes when . . . well, when clicked.

So they click (Irm does) on Click, and up comes a familiar title, or in this case maybe subtitle—The Hypertextuality of Everyday Life—followed this time by a parenthesized instruction: (*Click on any word of the above*).

"Your turn," declares our Irma. That's not the woman's

real name, any more than the man's is Fred; those are their "online" names, in a manner of speaking, for reasons presently to be made clear. Never mind, just now, their "real" names: they would involve us in too much background, personal history, all the things that real names import; we would never get on with the story. Sufficient to say that although these two are unmarried, they're coupled housemates of some years' standing, a pair of Baby Boomer TINKS ("two incomes, no kids") of some ethnicity or other, not necessarily the same, and profession ditto—but never mind those either. Sufficient to say that what they've just rolled out of the sack from (one of them perhaps more reluctantly than the other) is an extended session of makeup sex after an extended lovers' quarrel, the most serious of their coupleship—a quarrel currently truced but by no means yet resolved and maybe inherently unresolvable, although they're really working on it, fingers crossed.

A bit of background here, perhaps? That's Fred's uncharacteristic suggestion, to which Irma, uncharacteristically, forces herself to reply, "Nope: Your turn is your turn. On with the story."

And so her friend—partner, mate, whatever—reaches from behind her to the mouse and, kissing her (glossy walnut) hair, clicks on Hypertextuality. (This parenthesized matter, they agree, is stuff that might be left out of or cut from The Fred and Irma Story—see below—but that they've agreed to leave in, at least for the present.) (In the opinion of one of them, there could be much more of it.) (In the opinion of the other, much less—but never mind.)

No surprise, Fred's selection: Hypertextuality is that (sub)title's obvious topic word, modified by the innocuous-seeming article before it and the homely prepositional phrase after (containing its own unexotic substantive [Life] with adjectival modifier [Everyday]). This man, one infers correctly, is the sort who gets right down to business, to the meat of the matter. Everybody knows, after all (or believes that he or she knows), what "everyday life" is, different as may be the everyday lives of, say, Kuwaiti oil sheikhs and American felons serving life sentences in maximum-security prisons without possibility of parole (different, for that matter, as may be the everyday lives of FWFs ["friends who fornicate"] when they're at their separate businesses between F'yly Fs). The term "hypertextuality" itself may or may not interest our Fred; he's computer-knowledgeable but not computer-addicted. The phrase "everyday life," however, most certainly doesn't in itself interest him. The fellow's too busy *leading* (perhaps being led by?) his everyday life to be attracted to it as a subject. With the woman it's another story (possibly to come). But precisely because he hasn't associated something as fancy-sounding as "hypertextuality" with something as ordinary as "everyday life," the juxtaposition of the two piques Fred's curiosity. Not impossibly, for the man's no ignoramus (nor is his companion),

he hears in it an echo of Sigmund Freud's provocatively titled 1904 essay "The Psychopathology of Everyday Life." Everyday life psychopathological? (Try asking Irma, Fred.) (He will—another time.) Everyday life hypertextual? How so? In what sense? To find out, Fred has clicked on the implied proposition's most prominent but least certain term.

Some (the computer script now declares in effect, along with much of the paragraph above) out of mere orneriness will select one of the phrase's apparently insignificant elements—the The, for example, or the of—as if to say "Gotcha! You said 'Click on any word' . . ." The joke, however, if any, is on them: A good desk dictionary will list at least eight several senses of the homely word "the" in its adjectival function, plus a ninth in its adverbial ("the sooner the better," etc.)—twenty lines of fine-print definition in all, whereas the comparatively technical term just after it, "theanthropic," is nailed down in a mere three and a half. As for "of": no fewer than nineteen several definitions, in twenty-five lines of text, whereas the fancy word "oeuvre," just before it, is dispatched in a line and a half. Try "as," Fred, as in "As for 'of'"; try "for," Irma, or "or": the "simple" words you'll find hardest to define, whereas such technoglossy ones as "hypertextuality" . . .

Well. F and friend have just been shown an example of it, no? The further texts that lie behind any presenting text. Look up (that is, click on) the innocent word "of," and you get a couple hundred words of explanation. Click on any one of those or any one of their several phrases and clauses, such as "phrases and clauses," and get hundreds more. Click on any of *those*, etc. etc.—until, given time and clicks enough, you will have "accessed" virtually the sum of language, the entire expressible world. That's "hypertext," guys, in the sense meant here (there are other senses; see Hypertext): not the literal menus-of-menus and texts-behind-texts that one finds on CD-ROMs and other computer applications but rather the all-but-infinite array of potential explanations, illustrations, associations, glosses and exempla, even stories, that may be said to lie not only behind any verbal formulation but also behind any real-world image, scene, action, interaction. Enough said?

(If so, click on EXIT; otherwise select any one of the four foregoing—image, scene, etc.—for further amplification.)

Restless Fred moves to click on action but defers to Irma (their joint mood is, as mentioned, still tentative just now; he's being more deferential than is his wont), who clicks on scene and sees what the Author/Narrator sees as he pens this: a (white adult male right) hand moving a (black Mont-Blanc Meisterstück 146 fountain) pen (left to right) across the (blue) lines of (three-ring loose-leaf) paper in a (battered old) binder on a (large wooden former grade-school) worktable all but covered with implements and detritus of the writer's trade. (Parenthesized elements in this case = amplifications that might indeed be cut but might instead

well be “hypertexted” behind the bare-bones description, to be accessed on demand, just as yet further amplifications [not given, but perhaps hypertexted] might lie behind “white,” “adult male,” “MontBlanc,” “Meisterstück,” etc.) For example, to mention only some of the more conspicuous items: miscellaneous printed and manuscript pages, (thermal) coffee mug (of a certain design) on (cork) coaster, (annotated) desk calendar (displaying MAY), notebooks and notepads, the aforeconsulted (*American Heritage*) desk dictionary open to the “the” page (1,333) on its (intricately hand-carved Indian) table stand, (Panasonic auto-stop electric) pencil sharpener (in need of emptying), (Sun-beam digital) clock (reading 9:47 A.M.), (AT&T 5500 cordless) telephone (in place on base unit), Kleenex box (ScotTissue, actually) half full (half empty?) . . . etc. Beyond the table is the workroom’s farther wall: two (curtained and venetian-blinded double-hung) windows, between them a (three-shelf) bookcase (not quite filled with books, framed photos, and knickknacks and) topped by a wall mirror. The mirror (left of center) gives back a view not of the viewer—fortunately, or we’d never get out of the loop and on with the story—but of the workroom door (now closed against interruption) in the wall behind. (The two windows are closed, their figured curtains tied back, their blinds raised. Through them one sees first the green tops of foundation shrubbery [from which Irm infers, correctly, that the room is on the ground floor], and then assorted trees [L] and a sward of lawn [R] in the middle distance, beyond which lies a substantial body of [currently gray] water. Two [wooded] points of land can be seen extending into this waterway from the right-hand window’s right-hand side, the first perhaps half a mile distant, an [uncamouflaged] goose blind at its outer end, the second perhaps a mile distant and all but obscured now by a light drizzle that also blurs the yet-more-distant horizontal where [gray] water meets [gray] sky.)

(Click on any of these items, including those in brackets.)

But “Enough already,” says nudgy Fred, and he commandeers the mouse to click on action, whereupon some of the leaves on some of those trees move slightly in some breeze from some direction, the water surface ripples, and across it a large waterfowl flaps languidly left to right, just clearing some sort of orange marker-float out there on his or her way . . . upstream, one reasonably supposes, given that the stretch beyond that bird and those two points seems to be open water.

“That’s action?” Fred scoffs, and moves to click again, but determined Irma stays his mouse-hand with her free right (Irm’s a southpaw) while she registers yet a few further details. Atop that bookcase, for example (and therefore doubled in the mirror), are (L to R:) a (ceramic-based) lamp, the carapace of a (medium-size horseshoe) crab, and a (Lucite-box-framed) photograph of three (well-dressed)

people (L to R: an elderly man, a middle-aged man, and a younger woman) in (animated) conversation (at some sort of social function).

(Click on any detail, parenthesized or non-, in this scene.)

Irma springs for well-dressed—not nearly specific enough, by her lights, as a description of three people “at some sort of social function” (!) in the photograph on the bookcase in the not yet fully identified scene on their computer’s video-display terminal. With a really quite commendable effort of will, Fred restrains his impulse to utter some exasperated imprecation and snatch the freaking mouse from his freaking partner to freaking click on Fast Freaking Forward, On With the Story, EXIT, QUIT, Whatever. Instead he busses again his lover’s (glossy) (walnut) hair, bids her “Have fun; I’ll be futzing around outside, okay?” and (having slipped into jeans and T-shirt) clicks with his feet, so to speak, on the scene beyond his own workroom window.

Which twilit scene happens to be a small suburban backyard near the edge of the nation’s troubled capital city, where this occasionally dysfunctional pair pursue their separate occupations: Mark the Expediter, as he has lately come to call himself; Valerie the Enhancer, ditto. Those are their “real” given names, if not really the real names of their jobs, and with the reader’s permission (because all these digressions, suspensions, parentheses, and brackets are setting this Narrator’s teeth on edge as well as Mark’s) we’ll just follow him out there for a bit while Val explores to her still-bruised heart’s content the hypertextuality of everyday life.

OKAY. How they got into that “Fred and Irma” business (Mark and I can reconstruct less distractedly now, as he waves to a neighbor lady and idly deadheads a few finished rhododendron blooms along their open side porch) was as follows: They having pretty well burned out, through this late-May Sunday, their scorching quarrel of the day before (enough, anyhow, to make and eat together a weary but entirely civil dinner), after cleanup Mark volunteered to show Valerie, as he had several times previously promised, some things he’d lately learned about accessing the Internet for purposes other than E-mail: more specifically, about navigating the World Wide Web (WWW), and in particular (Valerie being Valerie, Mark Mark) about the deployment of “bookmarks” as shortcuts through that electronic labyrinth, the black hole of leisure and very antidote to spare time. Mark is, as aforementioned, no computer freak; the PC in his Expediter’s office, their Macintosh at home, are tools, not toys, more versatile than fax machine and phone but more time-expensive, too, and—like dictionaries, encyclopedias, and hardware stores (this last in Mark’s case; substitute department stores and supermarkets in Val’s)—

easier to get into than out of. Tactfully, tactfully (by his lights, anyhow) (the only lights he can finally steer by)—for they really were and still are burned, and their armistice is as fragile as it is heartfelt—he led her through the flashy home page of their Web-server program, actually encouraging her to sidetrack here and there in the What's New? and What's Cool? departments (she trying just as determinedly to blind her peripheral vision, as it were, and walk straight down the aisles, as it were, of those enticing menus) and then sampling a curious Web site that he had "bookmarked" two days earlier, before their disastrous Saturday excursion to the National Aquarium, in Baltimore.

<http://www.epiphs.art>, it was addressed: the home page of an anonymous oddball (Net-named "CNG") who offered a shifting menu of what he or she called "electronic epiphanies," or "E-piphs." On the Friday, that menu had comprised three entrées: 1) Infinite Regression v. All but Interminable Digression, 2) "Flower in the Crannied Wall," and 3) The Hypertextuality of Everyday Life. Mark had clicked on the curious-sounding second option and downloaded a spiel that at first interested but soon bored him, having to do with the relation between a short poem by Tennyson—

Flower in the crannied wall,
I pluck you out of the crannies,
I hold you here, root and all, in my hand,
Little flower—but if I could understand
What you are, root and all, and all in all,
I should know what God and man is.

—and the virtually endless reticulations of the World Wide Web. This time (that is, on this postmeridianal, postprandial, post-quarrel but ante-makeup-sexual Sunday) the menu read 1) The Coastline Measurement Problem and the Web, 2) "The Marquise went out at five" (CNG seemed to favor quotations as second entries; this one was familiar to neither of our characters), and 3) The Hypertextuality of Everyday Life. That third item being the only carry-over, M suggested they see what it was. V clicked on it—the entire title, as no option was then offered to select from among its component terms—and they found themselves involved in a bit of interactive "E-fiction" called "Fred and Irma Go Shopping," of which I'll make the same short work that they did.

Onscreen the underlined items were "hot"—that is, highlighted as hypertext links to be clicked on as the interacting reader chose. Methodical Mark would have started with Fred and worked his way L to R, but Valerie, left-handing the mouse, went straight for Irma:

Irma V., 43, art-school graduate, divorced, no children, currently employed as enhancer by small but thriving graphics firm in Annapolis MD while preparing show of her own computer-inspired fractal art for small but well-regarded gallery in Baltimore. Commutes to work from modest but comfortable and well-appointed rowhouse in

latter city's Bolton Hill neighborhood, 2 doors up from her latest lover, Fred M.

(more on Irma) (on with story)

"My turn?" Mark had asked at this point, and clicked on Fred M. before Valerie could choose from among divorced, no children, enhancer, well-appointed rowhouse, latest, and more.

Fred M., software expediter and current lover of Irma V.

(more on Fred) (on with story)

"That's the ticket," in Mark's opinion: "Who cares how old the stud is or where he majored in what? On with their story already."

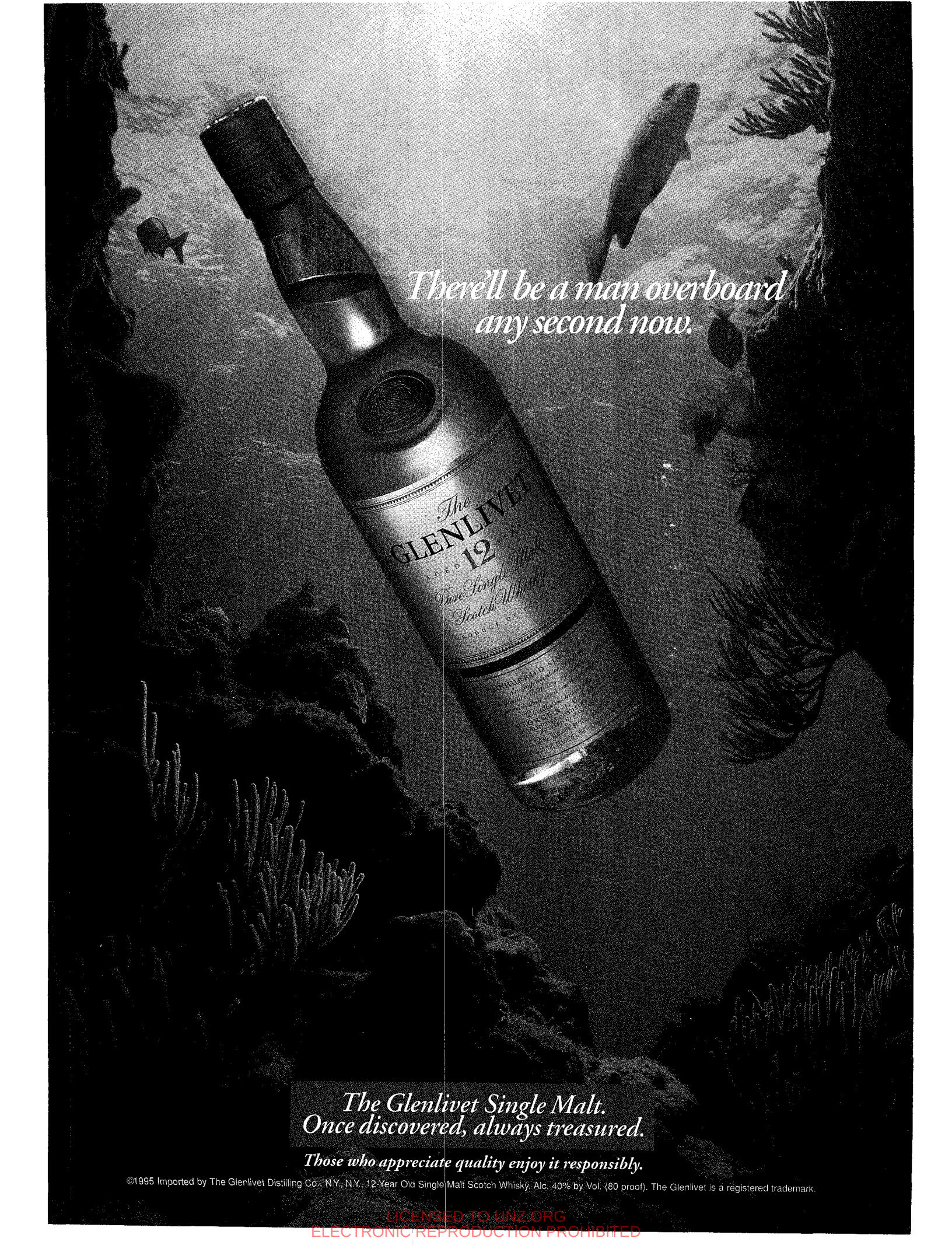
"My friend the Expediter," Val had murmured warningly, having raised her free hand at his "Who cares?" Whereat her friend the Expediter (it was from here that they borrowed those job titles for themselves; Valerie in fact does interior design and decoration for a suburban D.C. housing developer; Mark, a not-yet-successful novelist, writes capsule texts on everything under the sun for a CD-ROM operation in College Park, distilling masses of info into style-free paragraphs of a couple hundred words), duly warned, had replied, "Sorry there: Enhance, enhance."

But she had humored him by clicking on on, whereupon the title reappeared with only its last term now highlighted: "Fred and Irma Go Shopping."

"Off we go," had invited M. But when the clicked link called up a three-option menu—Department Store, Supermarket, Other—V had said "Uh-oh," and even Mark had recognized the too-perilous analogy to their debacle of the day before. Expediter and Enhancer in Supermarket, he with grocery list in one hand, pencil in other, and eye on watch, she already examining the (unlisted) radicchio and improvising new menu plans down the line . . .

"Unh-unh," he had agreed, and kissed her mouse-hand, then her mouth, then her throat. By unspoken agreement, bedward they'd headed, leaving the Mac to its screen-saver program (tropical fish, with bubbly sound effects). Somewhat later Valerie/Irma, re-undied, had returned to check for E-mail; the marine fauna dispersed into cyberspace; there floated Click in place of CNG's unpursued interactive E-tale—and here we all are.

RATHER, here's Valerie at Mark's workstation in their (detached suburban) house (V's studio is across the hall; unlike those FWFs Irma and Fred, our couple are committed [though unsanctified and unlegalized] life partners, each with half equity in their jointly owned [commodious, well-appointed, 1960s-vintage] split-level in Silver Spring [MD]), and here are Mark and I, out on the dusky porch, deadheading the rhodos while thinking hard and more



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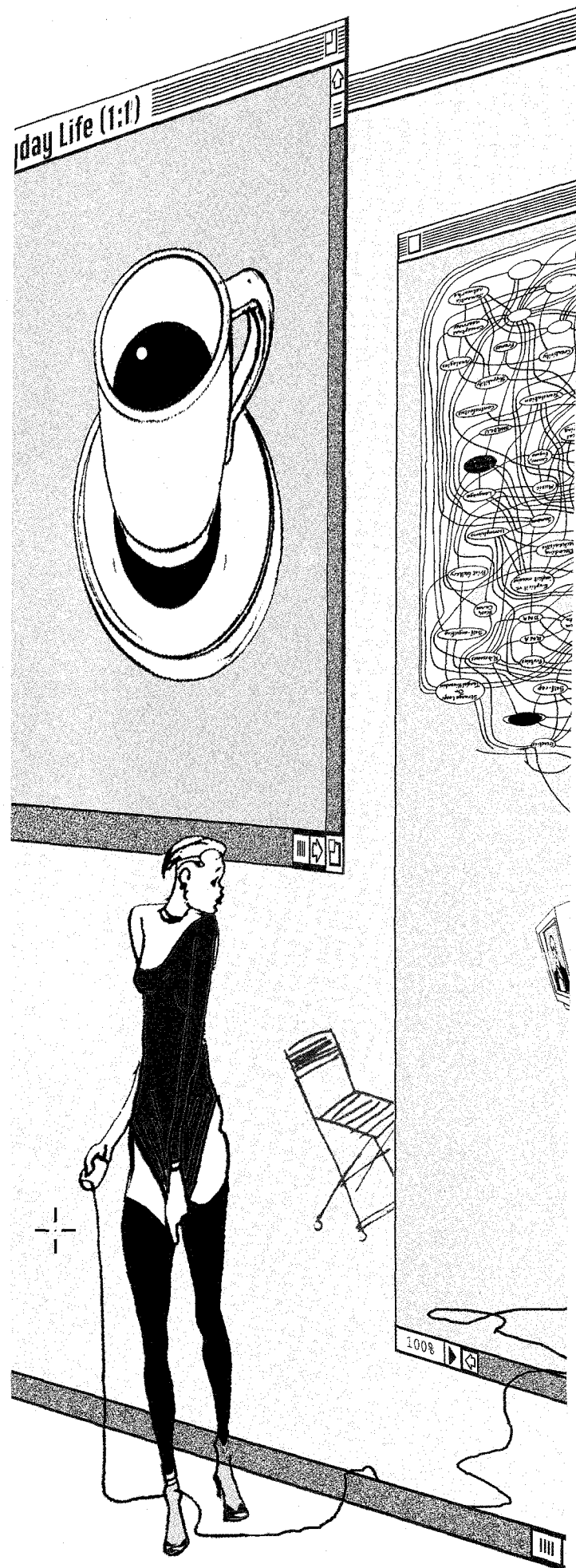
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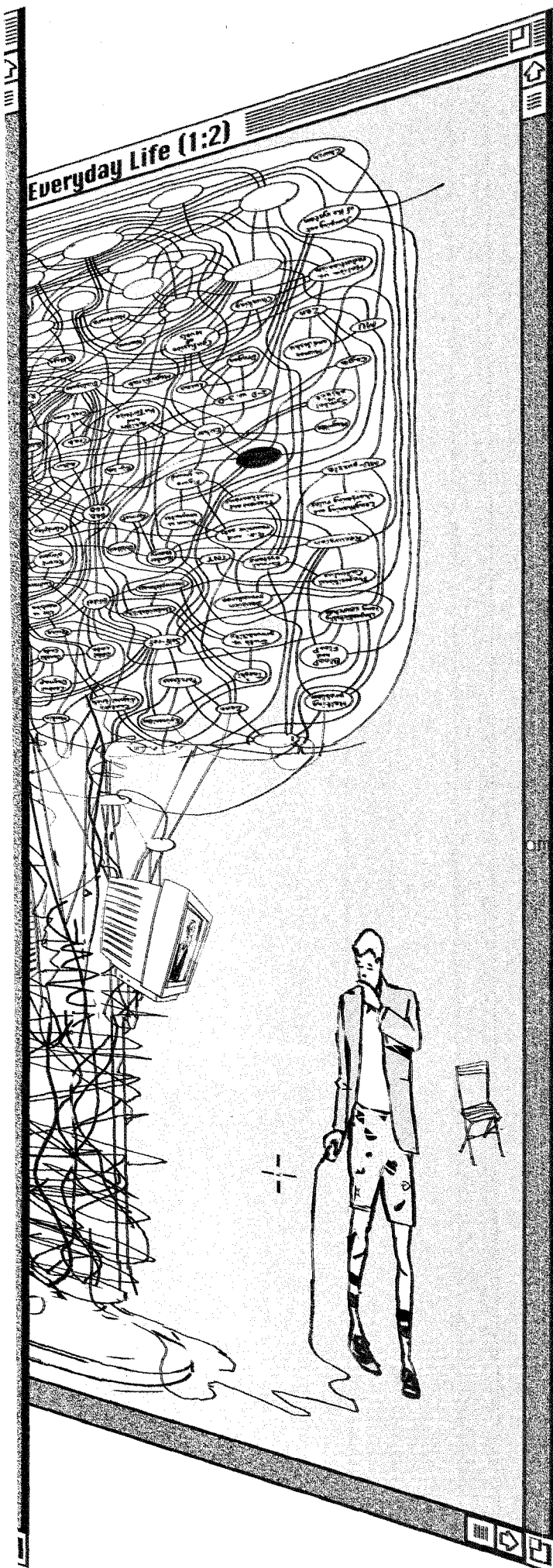
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or less in sync about certain similarities among 1) the sore subject of their Saturday set-to, 2) a certain aspect of their recent makeup sex, 3) the so-called Coastline Measurement Problem aforeoptioned by CNG, 4) an analogous problem or aspect of storytelling, and 5) how it is, after all, to be a self, not on the World Wide Web but in the wide web of the world. Can M think hard about five things at once? He can, more or less expeditiously, when his attention's engaged, plus 6) Zeno's famous paradox of Achilles and the Tortoise, plus 7) the difference between Socrates' trances and the Buddha's. Our chap is nothing if not efficient—a phrase worth pondering—and I'm enhancing his efficiency as worst I can, by impeding it. Valerie, meanwhile (at my offscreen prodding), has reluctantly torn her attention away from that photograph on that bookshelf in that creekside scriptorium in that onscreen scene hypertexted behind the word “scene” in the definition hypertexted behind Hypertextuality in CNG's menu option 3) The Hypertextuality of Everyday Life, itself hypertexted the second time up behind the word Click. The twenty-year-old wedding-reception photo, she has learned it is, of (present) Narrator with (present) wife and (late) father at (post-)wedding do for (now divorced) daughter and (then) new son-in-law—and nothing accessible beyond. Interactivity is one thing, restless reader; prying's another. Having lingered briefly on the shrub outside the RH window (*Viburnum burkwoodii*: grows to 6 ft [but here cropped to 4 for the sake of view and ventilation], clusters 3 in. wide, blooms in spring, zone 4, and it's a lucky wonder her professional eye didn't fix on those figured curtains, or we'd never have gotten her outside) and then on that waterfowl (Great Blue Heron [*Ardea herodias*, not *Coerulea*]) flapping languidly up-creek (west fork of Langford, off the Chester River, off Chesapeake Bay, on Maryland's Eastern Shore, where Narrator pens these words as he has penned many others), she's “progressing” unhurriedly toward those two intriguing points of land in the farther distance but can't resist clicking en route on that orange marker-float out yonder near the creek channel.

Marks an eel pot, 1 of 50 deployed in this particular tidal creek at this particular season by waterman Travis Pritchett of nearby Rock Hall MD in pursuit, so to speak, of “elvers”: young eels born thousands of miles hence in the Sargasso Sea and now thronging instinctively back to the very same freshwater tributaries of the Chesapeake from which their parents migrated several years earlier to spawn them in midocean: one of nature's most mysterious and powerful reproductive phenomena. The eels among Pritchett's catch will be processed locally for marketing either as seafood in Europe and Japan or as crab bait for Chesapeake watermen later in the season.

Travel-loving Val goes for Sargasso Sea, and there we'll leave her to circulate indefinitely with the spawning eels and other denizens of the Sargassum while we click on item 1) some distance above: the sore subject of their Saturday set-to.





THEY love and cherish each other, this pair. Although neither is a physical knockout, each regards the other and her- or him-self as satisfactorily attractive in face and form. Although neither can be called outstanding in his or her profession, both are entirely competent, and neither is particularly career-ambitious in her or his salaried job. Both enjoy their work and take an interest in their partner's. Most important, perhaps, although neither has a history of successful long-term relations with significant others, both have enough experience, insight, and humility to have smoothed their rougher edges, tempered their temperaments, developed their reciprocal forbearance, and in general recognized that at their ages and stages neither is likely to do better than he or she has currently done in the mate-finding way; indeed, that despite their sundry differences (at least some of which they've learned to regard as compensations for each other's shortcomings: see below), they are fortunately well matched in disposition, taste, and values. Neither drinks more than an occasional glass of wine at dinner, or smokes tobacco, or sleeps around, or fancies house pets; both are borderline vegetarian, environmentally concerned, morally serious but unsanctimonious secular unenthusiastic Democrats. Mark has perhaps the quicker intelligence, the duller sensibility, the more various knowledge; Valerie perhaps the deeper understanding, the readier human insight, the sounder education. They've never quarreled over sex or money. Both wish they had children, but neither finally wants them. (etc.—although that's really enough background for their Saturday set-to, no?)

They do have differences, of course: M enjoys socializing with others more than V does; she enjoys traveling more than he. He's more liberal (or less frugal) with money; she's more generous in the good-works way. He's less ready to take offense, but also slower to put their occasional tiffs behind him. She leaves closet and cabinet doors ajar and will not learn how to load their dishwasher properly (by *his* standards) (and the user's manual's); he wears his socks and underwear for two days before changing (turning his briefs inside out the second day) and often makes no effort to stifle his burps and farts when it's just the two of them. (etc., although [etc.]) These lapses or anyhow disharmonies they've learned to live with, by and large. The difference that really drives each up her or his wall is the one herein amply hinted at already, if scarcely yet demonstrated: at its mildest, a tease- or sigh-provoker, a prompter of rolled eyes and of fingertips drummed on dashboard, chair arm, desk- or thigh-top; at its sorest . . .

Saturday. Their week's official work done and essential house chores attended to, they had planned a drive up to nearby Baltimore to tour that city's Inner Harbor development, which they hadn't done in a while, and in particular the National Aquarium, which they'd never. After a not unreasonable detour to an upscale dry-goods emporium in the

vast shopping complex at Four Corners, a quick shot from their house, where Val really did need to check patterns and prices of a certain sort of figured drapery material for a job in the works (and, having done so, pointed out to Mark that there across the mall was a Radio Shack outlet where he could conveniently pick up the whatchamacallit-adaptor that he, not she, insisted they needed for their sound system's FM antenna [while she popped into the next-door Hallmark place for just a sec to replenish their supply of oddball greeting cards, which was running low]), they zipped from the D.C. Beltway up I-95 to Baltimore and reached Harbor Place in time for a pickup lunch about an hour past noon (no matter, as they'd had a latish breakfast)—an hour and a half past noon, more like, since the main parking lots were full by that time, as Mark had fretfully predicted, and so they had to park (quite) a few blocks away, and it wouldn't've made sense not to take a quick look-see at the new Oriole Park at Camden Yards stadium that was such a hit with baseball fans and civic-architecture buffs alike, inasmuch as there it stood between their parking garage and the harbor, and since their objective, after all (she reminded him when he put on his Fidget Face), wasn't to grab a sandwich, see a fish, and bolt for home but to *tour* Harbor Place, right? Which really meant the city's harbor area, which surely included the erstwhile haunts of Babe Ruth and Edgar Allan Poe. They weren't on a timetable, for pity's sake!

Agreed, agreed—but he *was* a touch hungry, was Mr. Mark, and therefore maybe a touch off his feed, as it were, especially after that unscheduled and extended stop at Four Corners; and it was to be expected that the ticket line at the

Aquarium might well be considerable, the day being both so fine and so advanced . . .

"So we'll catch the flight flick at the IMAX theater in the Science Center instead," Val verbally shrugged, "or I'll stand in the Aquarium line while you fetch us something from the food pavilion, and then you stand while I do The Nature Company. What's the problem?"

The problem, in Mark's ever-warmer opinion, was—rather, the problems were—that *a*) this constant sidetracking, this what's-the-rush digression, can take the edge off the main event by the time one gets to it, the way some restaurants lay on so many introductory courses and side dishes that one has no appetite for the entrée, or the way foreplay can sometimes be so protracted that (*etc.*). Having no timetable or deadlines doesn't mean having no agenda or priorities, wouldn't she agree? And *b*) it wasn't as if this were just something that happened to happen today, or he'd have no grounds to grouse; it was the way certain people went at *everything*, from leaving for work in the morning to telling an anecdote. How often had he waited in their Volvo wagon to get going in time to drop her off at her Metro stop on the way to his office and finally come back into the house and found her with one earring and one shoe on, making an impulsive last-minute phone call while simultaneously revising her DO list with one hand and rummaging in her purse with the other? (Valerie is a whiz at cradling the phone between ear and shoulder, a trick Mark can't manage even with one of those gizmos designed for the purpose.) How often had he been obliged to remind her, or to fight the urge to remind her, in mid-narrative in mid-dinner party, that the point of her story-in-regress was her little niece's *response* to what Val's sister's husband's mother had said when the tot had walked in on her in the guest-bath shower stall, not what that widow lady's new Cuban-American boyfriend (whom she hadn't even met yet at the time of the incident) apparently does for a living? And *c*) . . .

But he never reached *c*) (*click on it if you're curious*), because by this time V was giving as good as she got, right there on the promenade under the old *USS Constellation's* bowsprit, where their progress toward the distant tail of the National Aquarium ticket queue caesura'd for this exchange. As for *a*), damn it to hell, if in his (wrongheaded) opinion she was a Gemini who preferred hors d'oeuvres to entrées both at table and (as he had more than once intimated) in bed, then *he* was a bullheaded whambamthankyouma'amer of a Taurus whose idea of foreplay was three minutes of heavyweight humping to ejaculation instead of two; and *b*) because he himself had his hands full thinking and breathing simultaneously, he couldn't imagine anyone's doing five things at once better than he could manage one; for the reason that *c*) . . .

But she never reached *c*), for the reason that *b*) (now *b1*)) reminded her that *b2*) his idea of a joke was the punch line,

TIRED SEX

Trying to strike a match in a matchbook
that has lain all winter under the woodpile:

damp sulfur
on sodden cardboard.

I catch myself yawning. Through the window

I watch that sparrow the cat

keeps batting around.

Like turning the pages of a book the teacher assigned—

You ought to read it, she said.

It's great literature.

—CHANA BLOCH



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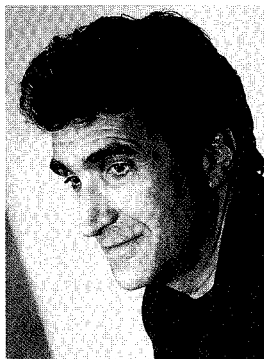
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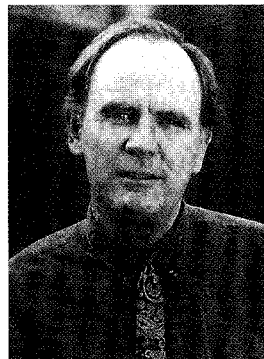
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Wobegon Boy



Robert Pinsky,
The Inferno of Dante



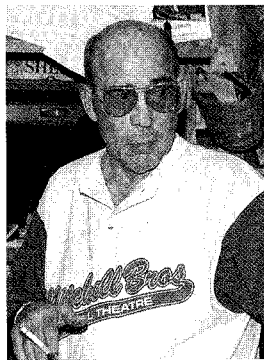
James Carroll,
An American Requiem



Cynthia Ozick,
The Puttermesser Papers



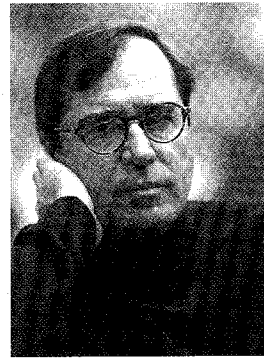
Jane Hirshfield,
The Lives of the Heart



Hunter S. Thompson,
The Proud Highway



Barbara Dafoe Whitehead,
The Divorce Culture



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his idea of a whodunit the last page, revealing who done it (no wonder he couldn't place his Middle-less novels even with an agent, much less with a publisher); and a2) if she might presume to back up a bit, now that it occurred to her, his idea of a full agenda was a single item, his top priority always and only the bottom line, his eternal (and infernal) *Let's get on with the story* in fact a *Let's get done with the story*, for the reason that—b3), she guessed, or maybe a3), who gave a damn?—his idea of living life was the same, *Let's get done with it*, and every time she saw him ready and fidgeting in the car a full ten minutes earlier than he knew as well as she they needed to leave for work, she was tempted to suggest that they drive straight to the funeral parlor instead and *get done with it* (etc., okay? On to the freaking fish already!).

But they never reached the FF ticket line, far less the marine exhibits themselves, and that's a pity, inasmuch as in the two-million-plus recirculating gallons of scrupulously monitored exhibit water in the National Aquarium's numerous tanks and pools are to be found some 10,000 aquatic animals (eels included), concerning every one of which much of natural-historical interest might be said. Under the volatile circumstances, however, it is no doubt as well they didn't, for how could they imaginably have moved and paused harmoniously through the exhibits (Valerie tranced at the very first of them, Mark glancing already to see what's next, and next after that) without reopening their quarrel? Which quarrel, mind, was still in noisy progress, if that's the right word, there under the *Constellation's* mighty bowsprit—which bowsprit, at the time I tell of, extended halfway across the promenade from the vessel's prow toward the second-floor Indian restaurant above the first-floor Greek one in Harbor Place's Pratt Street pavilion, but which at the time of this telling is alas no longer there, nor are those restaurants, nor is the formidable old warship whose bow that bowsprit sprits, or spritted, said vessel having been removed indefinitely for a much-needed, long-overdue, and staggeringly expensive major overhaul—to the tsking amusement of passersby (the lovers' spectacular, hang-it-all-out quarrel, I mean, of course, not the *Constellation's* shifting to some marine-repair limbo) including Yours Truly, who happened just then to be passing by and sympathetically so saw and heard them, or a couple not unlike them, toe-to-toeing it, and who then or subsequently was inspired to imagine (etc.).

Embarrassed, wasted, desperate, and sore, tear-faced Valerie anon turned her back on the dear, congenitally blinkered bastard whom she so loves and just then despised and stomped off back toward the Light Street food pavilion and their parking garage, no objective in mind except breathing space and weeping room. Mark was damned if he'd go chasing after the beloved, indispensable, impossible, darling bitch, but he did so after all, sort of; anyhow he trudged off

in the same general direction, but made himself pause—Valerie-like, though in part to spite her—to half attend a juggling act in progress at the promenade's central plaza, where street musicians and performers entertain. Although he was as aware as was V (and no less alarmed) that the heavy artillery just fired could never be unfired, and that it had perilously, perhaps mortally, wounded their connection, he nonetheless registered with glum admiration the jugglers' so-skillful routine: their incremental accumulation of difficulties and complications at a pace adroitly timed to maximize dramatic effect without straining audience attention past the point of diminishing returns, a business as tricky in its way as the juggling itself—and now he couldn't refind Valerie among the promenaders. Well, there was The Nature Company yonder; she had mentioned that. And beyond it were the food concessions; she must have been as hungry by then as he, but probably as appetiteless, too, from their wringing-out. And somewhere beyond or among those concessions were the public restrooms, whereto she might have retreated to collect herself (V is better than M at self-collection), and beyond them the parking ramp. Did she have her car keys? Probably, in her purse; anyhow there were spares in a magnetic holder under the rear bumper brace. Would she drive off without him, for spite? He doubted it, although she seemed more hurt and angry than he'd ever known her to be; anyhow, the lot ticket was in his wallet—not that she mightn't pay the hefty lost-ticket fee just to strand him, or, more likely, just to get out of there, with no thought of him either way. Most probably, however, she would collapse in furious tears in the Volvo's passenger seat, poor sweetheart, and then lay into him with more of her inexcusable even if not wholly off-the-mark insults when he tried to make peace with her, the bitch.

Well, she wasn't in The Nature Company, where among the coruscating geodes and "Save the Rain Forest" stuff his attention was caught by one of those illuminated flat-projection Earth-map clocks that show which parts of the planet are currently daylit and which in darkness (the East Coast of North America was just then correctly mid-afternoonish; dusk was racing across Asia Minor, dawn approaching Kamchatka and Polynesia). What (momentarily) arrested him in this instance was not that vertiginous reminder of onstreaming time and the world's all-at-onceness but rather the profusion of continental coastlines, necessarily much stylized in so small-scale a rendering but considerably articulated all the same. Chesapeake Bay, for example (180-some miles in straight-line length, but with upwards of 9,600 miles of tidal shoreline in its forty major rivers and their all but innumerable creeks and coves), was a simple small nick up there between Washington and Philadelphia, yet quite distinguishable in shape and position from Delaware Bay, just above it; even the Delmarva Peninsula, between them, no bigger here than a grain of rice, had overall its characteristic

sand-flea shape. Framed nearby, as if to invite speculation on the contrast, was a large-scale, fine-grained aerial-photo map of Baltimore's Inner Harbor, every pier and building sharply resolved, including the no-longer-present-as-I-write-this *Constellation*. One could distinguish not only individual small watercraft paddling about or moored at the harbor bulkheads but their occupants as well, and strollers like varicolored sand grains on the promenade.

One could not, however (Mark duly reflected, looking now for the exit to the food court and/or for a glimpse of Valerie's . . . yellow blouse, was it? Yes, he was almost certain: her yellow whatchamacallit blouse with those thingamajigs on it and either a white skirt or white culottes, he couldn't recall which and saw no sign of either), even with so fine a resolution, distinguish male from female, for example, or black from white from Asian, much less identify himself and Valerie having it out under the warship's bowsprit if they'd happened to be there doing that at that moment, much less yet see the thingamabobs on her whatchamacallits and much less yet the individual whatsits on each thingamabob (*etc.*)—any more than the most finely drawn map of the Chesapeake could show every barnacle on every pile of every pier on every creeklet (*etc.*): the famous Coastline Measurement Problem aforereferred to, in terms whereof the estuary's shore length could as well be put at 96 million miles as 9,600 (*etc.*). Which all led him to, but not yet across, the verge of recognizing . . .

Yellow blouse? Yes, out there by the Polish-sausage stand, but minus thingamajiggies and blousing a red-faced matron whose steatopygous buttocks were hugely sheathed in pink cotton warm-up pants (though there might, to be sure, he reminded himself, be a truly saintly spirit under all that [maybe helplessly genetic] grossness). *No Middles to his novels*, V had told him! His eye ever on the destination, not the getting there! Already figuring the server's tip while she lingered over the appetizer! No greater evidence of the degree of Pal Val's present pissed-offness than that she had been sidetracked neither in The Nature Company, as even he had briefly been, nor in the food court (where she would normally have been provisioning the pair of them, bless her, with goodies both for present consumption and for future enjoyment at home), nor on the pedestrian overpass to the parking lot, where in other circumstances she was entirely capable of dawdling to contemplate at length the vehicular traffic below, the cumulus formations overhead, the observation elevators up-and-downing the Hyatt Regency façade nearby. Unless she had indeed withdrawn into a women's room (he had forgotten to locate the WCs; couldn't've done anything in that precinct anyhow except dumbly stand by), she must have beelined for the car, as did he now finally.

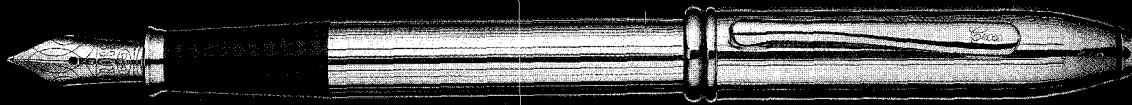
No Valerie. Well, she was more liable than he to forget the level and pillar numbers of their parking slot. Not im-

possibly, in her present troubled state, she was wandering the ramps in a weepy rage. Plenty troubled himself, he walked up one level and down one, gave up the search as counterproductive, leaned against the Volvo's tailgate for some minutes, arms crossed, and then trudged back, *faute de mieux*, toward the walkway/footbridge/overpass/whatever. Halfway across it he stopped, disconsolate, and simply stood—facing uptown, as it happened, but really seeing nothing beyond his distress.

Which let's consider himwith for just a paragraph. A physically healthy, mentally sound, well-educated, (usually) well-fed, comfortably housed and clothed, gainfully employed, not unattractive early-fortyish middle-class male WASP American is at least temporarily on the outs with his housemate/girlfriend, a comparably advantaged and not unattractive professional who has declared her opinion that he hasn't the talent to achieve his heart-of-hearts career aim and that this deficit is of a piece with a certain general characteristic of his that she finds objectionable. So Mr. Mark's pride is bruised, his self-respect ruffled, the future of his closest and most valued personal relationship uncertain indeed. *So what?* he has asked himself before any of us can ask him. The world comprises approximately 4.7 zillion more mattersome matters, from saving the tropical rain forests to finding money enough in the chaotic post-Soviet Russian economy to bring that country's fiscally stranded cosmonauts back to Earth. Not that love and loss, or commitment and (potential) estrangement, aren't serious even among Volvo-driving yuppies, but really . . . What of real consequence is at stake here? If this were fiction (the wannabe writer asked himself), a made-up story, why should anyone give a damn?

Well, it *wasn't* fiction from Mark's perspective, although out of aspirant-professional habit he couldn't help considering (as he resumed his troubled path-retracement back to and through the Light Street pavilion in search of his dear damned Valerie) how, if it were, it ought properly to end. Reconciliation? On what terms? Uneasy armistice? Virtual divorce? In each case signifying what of interest to a reader who presumes the characters and situation to be imaginary?

From *our* point of view, of course, they *are* imaginary, and so these questions immediately apply (in a proper story they would never have come up; bear in mind that it was heart-hurt Mark who raised them) and shall be duly though not immediately addressed. Even their allegedly Middle-challenged poser, however, understood—as he rescanned in vain the food concessions and monitored for a fruitless while the traffic to and from the women's room after availing himself of the men's—that more's at stake here than the ups and downs of early-middle-aged Baby Boomer love. Not until "tomorrow" (the Sun following this sore Sat) will CNG's interactive E-fiction serendipitously supply the terms "Expediter" and "Enhancer" to shorthand the char-



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TOURNEAU

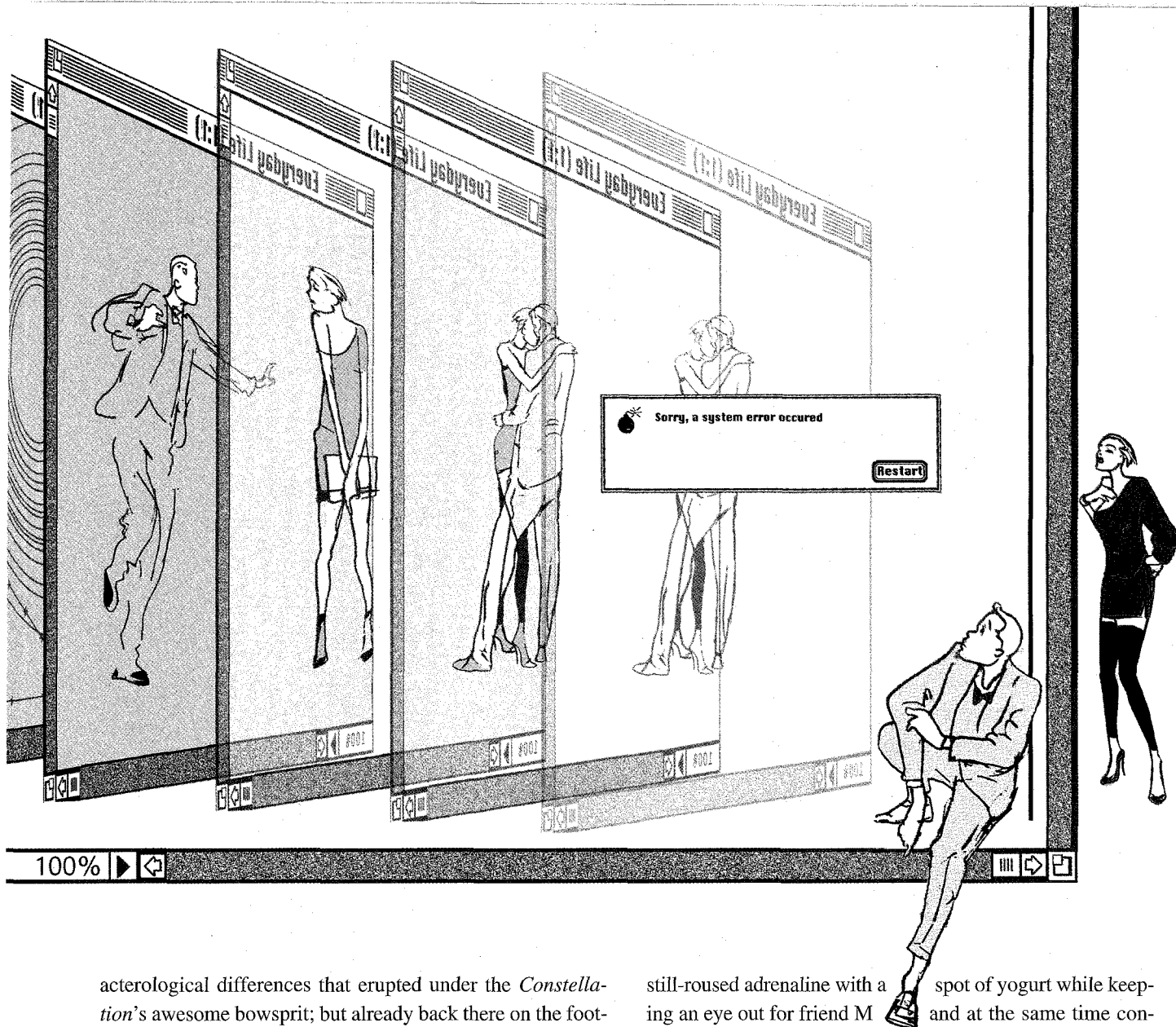
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acterological differences that erupted under the *Constellation's* awesome bowsprit; but already back there on the footbridge Mark sensed that the conflict here is larger than any temperamental incompatibility between Fred and Irma, or himself and Val: it's between fundamentally opposite views of and modes of dealing with the infinitely complex nature of reality.

Valerie sensed that too; she was, indeed, already deep into the pondering thereof when, almost simultaneously, she espied him approaching from the second-level fooderies, and he her at a railingside table on the open deck out there overlooking the promenade. Far from roaming the ramps in a weepy blind rage, or storming off alone in the Volvo (Val's better than Mark, we remember, at shrugging off their infrequent blowups; he tends to forget that and to project from his own distress), our yellow-bloused Enhancer, her chair tipped back and feet propped on the balcony rail, was finishing off a chocolate-chocolate-chip frozen-yogurt waffle cone while simultaneously *a)* teaching her sumbitch lover a lesson by neither fleeing nor chasing after him; *b)* facilitating their reunion by staying put, as her mother had taught her to do in little-girlhood if "lost" in, say, a department store or supermarket, and *c)* calming her

still-roused adrenaline with a spot of yogurt while keeping an eye out for friend M and at the same time considering, in a preliminary way, his criticisms of her and the differences, as she saw them, between Socrates' famous occasional "trances," the Buddha's, and her own. They had in common, those trances, a self-forgetfulness, a putting of circumbient busyness on hold in favor of extraordinary concentration. But the Buddha under the bo tree was transcendently *meditating*, thinking *about* nothing in particular while subsuming his ego-self into the cosmic "Buddha self"; Socrates, tranced in the agora or come upon by his protégés stock-still in some Athenian side street, was strenuously *contemplating*, presumably in finely honed logical terms, such uppercase concepts as Knowledge, Reality, Justice, and Virtue. She, however, beguiled indefinitely by . . . by the hypertextuality of everyday life, we might as well say, as encountered in the very first fish tank in the National Aquarium, or in the book beside the book upshelf from the book that she had gone to fetch from the library stacks, or on the counter across from the counter in the department en route to the department that she had been vectored toward in the department store downplaza from the supermarket that she was finally aiming for, was not so much

meditating or contemplating as *fascinating*: being bemused and fascinated by the contiguities, complexities, interscalar resonances, and virtually endless multifariousness of the world, while at the same time often doing pretty damned efficiently several things at once.

"Damn," said Mark, hands on hips on deck beside her. "Damn and damn."

"The same," came back his unfazed friend. "That said, is it on with our day or on with our spat?"

"Spat!" had all but spat more-than-ever-now-pissed-off M.

"Pity." Val gave her (glossy walnut) hair a toss and licked a drip from her (waffle) cone. "I thought *you* were the big mover-onner and I was the overdweller-on-things. Lick?"

"No, thank you. There's a difference between moving on and hit-and-run driving, Val."

"Shall we discuss that difference?" More a challenge than a cordial invitation.

"No, thank you. Because what happened back there was no accident."

"So let's discuss *that*: its non-accidentality."

"No, thank you very much," the fire gone out of him. "Because there'd be no bloody end to it. Let's go the hell home."

But "Not so fast, Buster," had countered Ms. Valerie, and although they did in fact then go the hell home after all, they ventilated reciprocally all the way, each charging the other now with spoiling the day in addition to his or her more basic grievances. Through that evening, too, they had kept scarifyingly at it, heartsick Mark from time to time declaring "What it all comes down to . . ." and tearful Valerie being damned if she'd let him shortcut to that bottom line before he'd had his nose thoroughly rubbed en route in this, that, and the other. Exhausted half-sleep, as far apart as manageable in their king-size bed. Then a grumpy, burned-out Sunday, both parties by that time more saddened and alarmed than angry, each therapeutically pursuing her or his separate business till Happy Hour—which wasn't, but which at least brought them civilly together as was their custom for their (single) glass of wine with a bit of an hors d'oeuvre, over which they exchanged tentative, strained apologies, and then apologies less strained and tentative. Through dinner prep each guardedly conceded a measure of truth in the other's bill of complaints; through dinner itself (with, uncharacteristically, a second glass of wine, much diluted with club soda) a measure less guarded and more generous. Thereafter, by way of goodwill respite from the subject, M had offered to show V that business he'd mentioned sometime earlier about navigating the World Wide Web. She had welcomed the diversion; they had boot-ed up Mark's Macintosh, had shortcut to CNG's E-piphanies home page with its E-tale of Expediter Fred and Enhancer Irma, had aborted it early in favor of makeup sex (*etc.*)—and here they are.

M M-HM. And where is that, exactly?

That exactly is in separate rooms of their (jointly owned, jointly tenanted) Silver Spring house and likewise in their extraordinarily strained but by no means severed connection. More exactly yet, it is *a*) in Mark's case, on their pleasant, now dark side porch, where—having thought hard and efficiently about those five or seven interrelated matters aforelisted (Saturday set-to, makeup sex, Coastline Measurement Problem, analogous aspect of storytelling, selfhood in the world's wide web, *etc.*)—in a sudden access of loving appreciation of his companion and their indispensable differences he turns from his idle rhododendron-tending to hurry herward with the aim of embracing her and ardently reaffirming that she is not only to him indispensable but by him treasured, and that he is determined to temper his maddening get-on-with-it-ness with as much of her wait-let's-explore-the-associationsness as his nature permits. And *b*) in Valerie's case, in Mark's workroom, where—having floated a fascinated while in the Sargasso Sea of everyday life's virtual hypertextuality (but at no time so bemused thereby as to lose sight of the subject of their Saturday set-to)—in a sudden access of loving *etc.* she bolts up from Mark's Mac to hurry himward with corresponding intent. The physical halfway point thembetween happens to be the fourth-from-bottom step of the staircase connecting their house's ground floor (living room, dining room, kitchen/breakfast room, lavatory, front and rear entry halls, side porch, attached garage) and its second (main bedroom and bath, V's and M's separate workrooms with hallway and No. 2 bath between, library-loft [accessible from main BR] over garage) (additionally, in basement and thus irrelevant to their projectible rendezvous: TV/guest room, workshop, utility room). Where they'll actually meet is another matter, perhaps suspendable while Narrator tidies a few loose ends. To wit:

- Any reasonable reader's suspicions to the contrary notwithstanding, "CNG" stands in this context not for Compressed Natural Gas but rather for Center of Narrative Gravity: in a made-up story, the author's narrative viewpoint; in real life-in-the-world, however, the self itself, of which more presently unless it's clicked on now . . .
- Presently, then. Meanwhile, as to the aforedemonstrated essential difference between Ms. Valerie's sensibility and Mr. Mark's, it is nowhere more manifest than in the way each, in the other's opinion, tells a story. "Anna train squish," is how Val claims Mark would render Leo Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina*; indeed, given the man's Middle-challengedness, she suspects he might skip the train. She, on the other hand (claims he, whether teasingly or in their Saturday set-to mode), would never get beyond Count Tolstoy's famous opening sentence, "Happy families are all alike;" *etc.*—indeed, would never get through, much less past, it, inasmuch as she would need to pause to explore such counterevidence as that her family and Mark's, for example, while both prevailingly quite "happy,"

are as different in nearly every other respect as armadillos and zebras; and once having clicked on Mark's family, or equally on hers (or, for that matter, on armadillos or zebras), she would most likely never get back to Tolstoy's proposition, not to mention on to its second half and the eight-part novel therebeyond.

- Myself, I'm on both their sides in this matter, not only because M and V seem equally reasonable, decent, harmless souls, but also because their tendencies represent contrary narrative impulses of equal validity and importance. A satisfyingly told story requires enough "Valerie"—that is, enough detail, amplification, and analysis—to give it clarity, texture, solidity, verisimilitude, and empathetic effect. It requires equally enough "Mark"—that is, efficiently directed forward motion, "profluence," on-with-the-storyness—for coherence, anti-tedium, and dramatic effect. In successful instances a right balance is found for the purpose (and adjusted for alternative purposes). In unsuccessful instances . . .

Friend of Valerie and Mark's: So, how'd your vacation go, guys?

M: Cool—Spain in ten days.

V: Really terrific, what little we got to see. The very first morning, for example, in Avila—Do you know Avila? Saint Teresa and all that?—we were in the Parador Nacional, just outside the old city wall. You've stayed in the Spanish paradores, right? So, anyhow, the one in Avila's this fifteenth-century palace called Piedras Albas ('cause that's what it's made of, white stones from [etc., never getting past the breakfast churros, inasmuch as hypertexted behind them, for Valerie, lie all of Spanish history, culture, geography, and the rest, inseparable from the rest of Europe's and the world's. Mark had had practically to drag the rapt, protesting woman out of that stern and splendid place, to get on with their itinerary]) . . .

- So what? you ask, unless one happens to take some professional interest in storytelling, which you for one do not? Thanks for clicking on that Frequently Asked Question, reply CNG and I: The "so what" is that that same right-balance-for-the-purpose finding applies to the measurement of coastlines, the appropriate scaling of maps, and—Hold that clicker—not only interpersonal relations, Q.E.D., but intrapersonal ones as well.

Intrapersonal relations?

Thanks again, and yes indeed. For what is Valerie, finally, what is Mark, what are you, and what am I—in short, what is the self itself—if not what has been aptly called a "posited center of narrative gravity" that, in order to function in and not be overwhelmed by the chaotically instreaming flood of sense data, continuously notices, ignores, associates, distinguishes, categorizes, prioritizes, hypothesizes, and selectively remembers and forgets; that continuously spins trial scenarios, telling itself stories about who it is and what it's up to, who others are and what they're up to; that finally *is*, if it is anything, those continuously revised, contin-

uously edited stories? In sum, what we're dealing with here is no trifling or merely academic matter, friends: finding, maintaining, and forever adjusting from occasion to occasion an appropriate balance between the "Mark" in each of us and the "Valerie" ditto is of the very essence of our selfhood, our being in the world. We warmly therefore hope, do CNG & I (click on that & and see it turn into an =, + much more on intrapersonal relations), that that couple works things out, whenever and wherever they recouple.

When. One short paragraph from now, it will turn out, although given the infinite subdivisibility of time, space, and narrative (not to mention The Hypertextuality of Everyday Life), it could as readily be ten novels hence or never. See Zeno's paradoxes of time and motion; see swift Achilles close forever upon the tortoise; see Spot run . . .

Where. Not on that fourth-step-from-the-bottom *Mittelpunkt*, it turns out, but back where this story of them started. Mark (inescapably himself even when determined to be more Valish) is off the porch and through the dining room and up the staircase and into the upstairs hallway by the time Valerie (who, decidedly herself even after deciding to be more Marklike, has stepped from M's workroom first into the No. 2 bathroom to do a thing to her hair or face before hurrying porchward, then into their bedroom to slip a thigh-length T-shirt over her undies in case the neighbor lady's out there gardening by streetlight, then back into M's workroom to exit the Internet so that their access meter won't run on while they finish making up, which could take a happy while), hearing him hurrying herward, re-rises from Mark's Macintosh to meet its open-armed owner with open arms.

To her (glossy) (walnut) hair he groans, "I love you so damned much!"

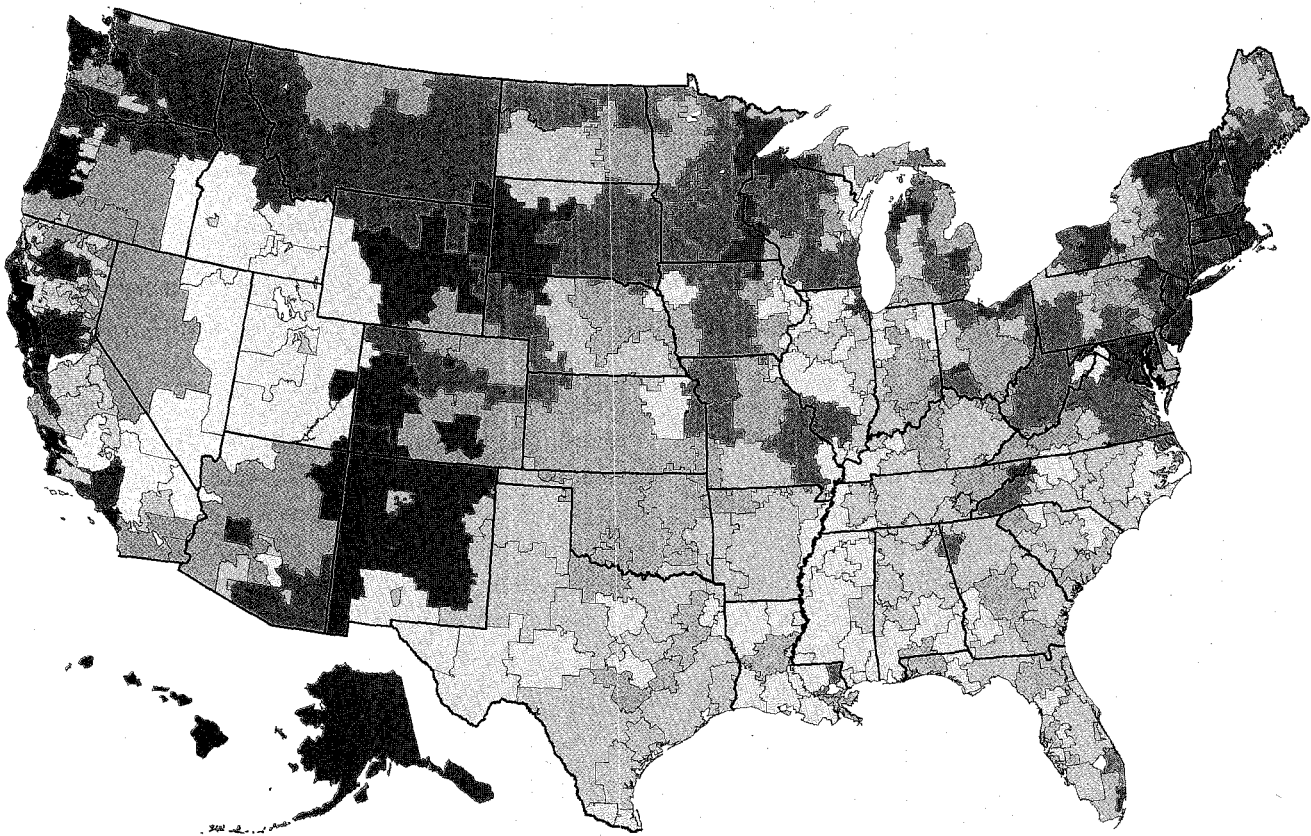
To his (right) collarbone she murmurs, "I love you more."

They then vow (etc.), and one thing sweetly segues to another right there on the workroom's (Berber) wall-to-wall, while the screen saver's tropical fish and seahorses burble soothingly per program themabove.

- *The Marquise Went Out at Five* (*La Marquise sortit à cinq heures*) is the title of a 1961 novel by the French writer Claude Mauriac and a refrain in the Chilean novelist José Donoso's 1984 opus *Casa de Campo* (*A House in the Country*). The line comes from the French poet and critic Paul Valéry, who remarked in effect that he could never write a novel because of the *arbitrariness*, the vertiginous *contingency*, of such a "prosaic" but inescapable opening line as, say, "The Marquise went out at five"—for the rigorous M. Valéry, a paralyzing toe-dip into what might be called the hypertextuality of everyday life.

Not too fast there, Mark. Not too slow there, Val. That's got it, guys; that's got it . . . (so "CNG" [= I/you/eachand-allofus] encourages them from the hyperspatial wings, until agile Valerie lifts one [long] [lithe] [cinnamon-tan] leg up and with her [left] [great] toe gives the Mac's master switch a

Primary Care to Spare?



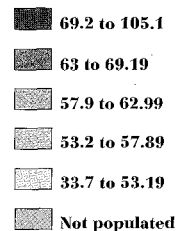
RECENT discussions of the nation's physician work force have focused on its imbalance—the oversupply of specialists and the shortage of generalists, or primary-care providers. One proposed response: bolster medical schools' efforts to attract students to primary care, with the ultimate goal of producing a majority of graduates committed to generalist practice. But, as David Goodman, M.D., and his colleagues at Dartmouth Medical School suggest with the map above, which displays their calculation of the distribution of generalists in 1996, the shortage may not be as grave as reported—and, indeed, does not exist if the supply is viewed in the aggregate. The need for more generalists is not national but regional (mostly in rural and inner-city areas). Training more and more generalists is not a solution, Goodman and his colleagues say. The focus must be on giving doctors incentives (such as subsidies) to move to shortage areas.

Specialists and generalists alike tend to establish practices in affluent urban areas, adding to already abundant existing supplies. Nationwide, the distribution of generalists in 1996 ranged from highs of more than 100 per 100,000 residents (in the hospital-referral regions for San Francisco and White Plains, New York, for example) to a low of 34 (in the McAllen,

Texas, area, on the Mexican border). Although there are no agreed-upon standards for what constitutes a sufficient supply of doctors for a given population, a number of adequately staffed locales may serve as reference points in determining how many doctors are needed where shortages now exist—and where excess doctors can be found.

About a third of the U.S. population lives in areas with a higher ratio of generalists than there is in the Minneapolis region, where a primarily managed-care system operates efficiently with 68 per 100,000. If all regions with a higher ratio of generalists were adjusted to match Minneapolis, almost 10,000 generalists would be left over. If the same adjustment were made using as the baseline Wichita, Kansas (61 per 100,000), a mostly fee-for-service region, more than 17,500 generalists would be left over—fewer than half of whom would be needed to bring the number of generalists in *all* lower-staffed regions up to Wichita's level. —Allan Reeder

Generalist physicians
per 100,000 residents
(National average = 65)



Source: The Center for the
Evaluative Clinical Sciences

No Middle Way on the Environment

by PAUL R. EHRLICH, GRETCHEN C. DAILY,
SCOTT C. DAILY, NORMAN MYERS, and JAMES SALZMAN

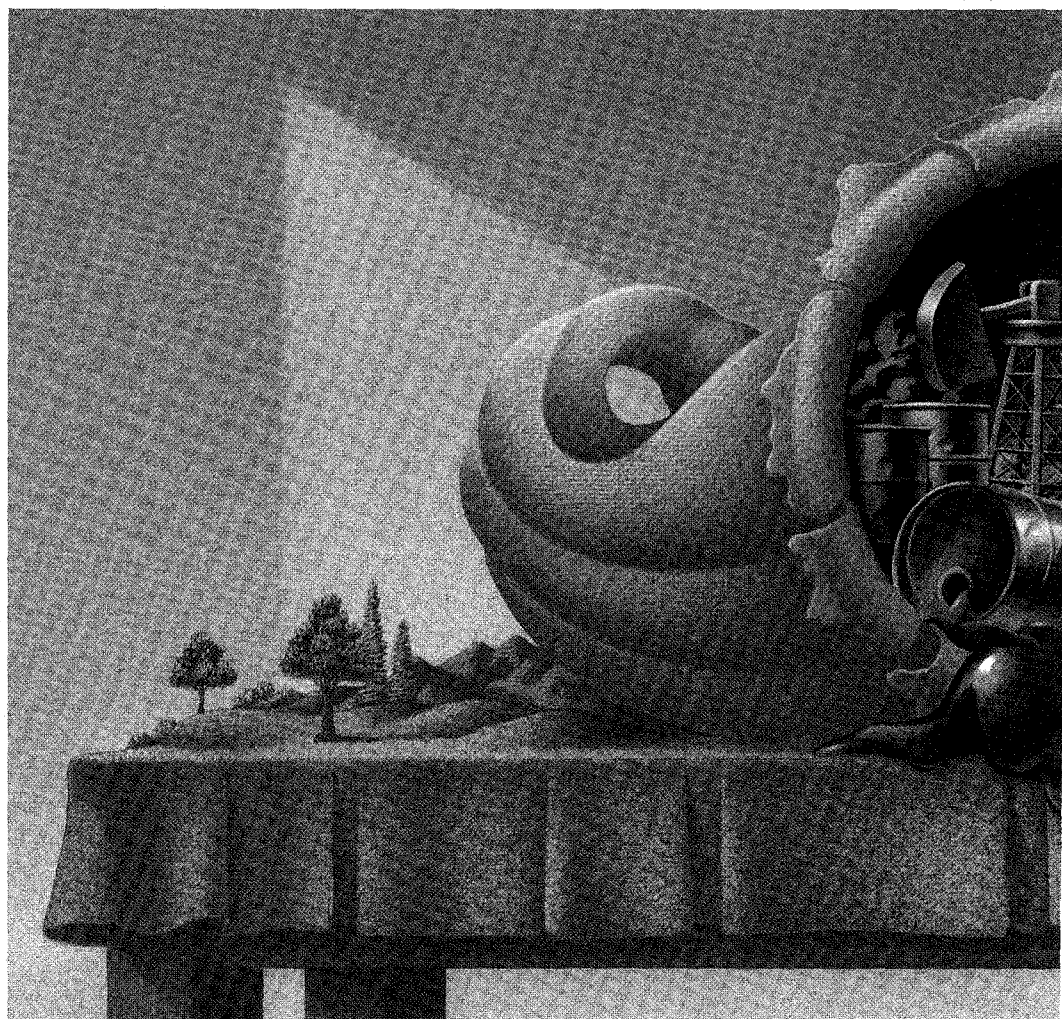
The authors, environmental scientists, warn that in the debate between “cornucopians” and informed prophets of the dangers posed by overconsumption, splitting the difference won’t work—and that the cornucopians are wrong

LAYPEOPLE frequently assume that in a political dispute the truth must lie somewhere in the middle, and they are often right. In a scientific dispute, though, such an assumption is usually wrong. Copernicus, in *De Revolutionibus Orbium Coelestium* (1543), showed (to the distress of the establishment) that the earth both rotated on its axis and, along with the other planets, revolved around the sun. The controversy about what revolved where was not resolved by a compromise that had the earth stationary on its axis but circling the sun. Pasteur put an end to the debate over whether some organisms could be produced by “spontaneous generation” by showing that bacteria descended from other bacteria. The answer wasn’t a compromise in which mice couldn’t be spontaneously generated whereas flies and microbes could.

There has long been a dispute between “cornucopians” and scientists over whether too much consumption in rich countries poses a serious threat to the global environment. In his recent article regarding the state of our planet, “Do We Consume Too Much?” (June *Atlantic*), Mark Sagoff fell

headlong into the truth-in-the-middle trap by asserting that “neither side has it right.” He has done a disservice to the public by promoting once again the dangerous idea that technological fixes will solve the human predicament.

But the debate goes well beyond Sagoff. In challenging his views, we are also challenging a whole current of opinion based on a sophistic application of a political model (in which



split-the-difference outcomes are the rule) to the environment.

Sagoff argues that concern over the depletion of natural resources and the impact of their current levels of use is misplaced, and that technological innovation will remedy any problems that do arise. This view certainly is not shared by the scientific community. For example, the 1992 "World Scientists' Warning to Humanity" (signed by more than 1,500 leading scientists, including more than half of all living Nobel laureates in the sciences) stated that "human beings and the natural world are on a collision course" and that people in developed nations "must greatly reduce their overconsumption, if we are to reduce pressures on resources and the global environment."

A 1993 statement on world population issued by fifty-eight scientific academies dealt with consumption in a similar vein. The academies, which include the U.S. National Academy, the British Royal Society, the French, German, Swedish, Russian, and Indian Academies, and the Third World Academy, represent the global scientific community. They concluded,

If all people of the world consumed fossil fuels and other natural resources at the rate now characteristic of developed countries (and with current technologies), this would greatly intensify our already unsustainable demands on the bio-

sphere. . . . As scientists cognizant of the history of scientific progress and aware of the potential of science for contributing to human welfare, it is our collective judgment that continuing population growth poses a great risk to humanity. Furthermore, it is not prudent to rely on science and technology alone to solve problems created by rapid population growth, wasteful resource consumption, and poverty.

Thus the very people who would produce the technological fixes in which Sagoff places such faith do not share his complacency.

Sagoff's thesis rests on a series of basic misconceptions.

Misconception No. 1:

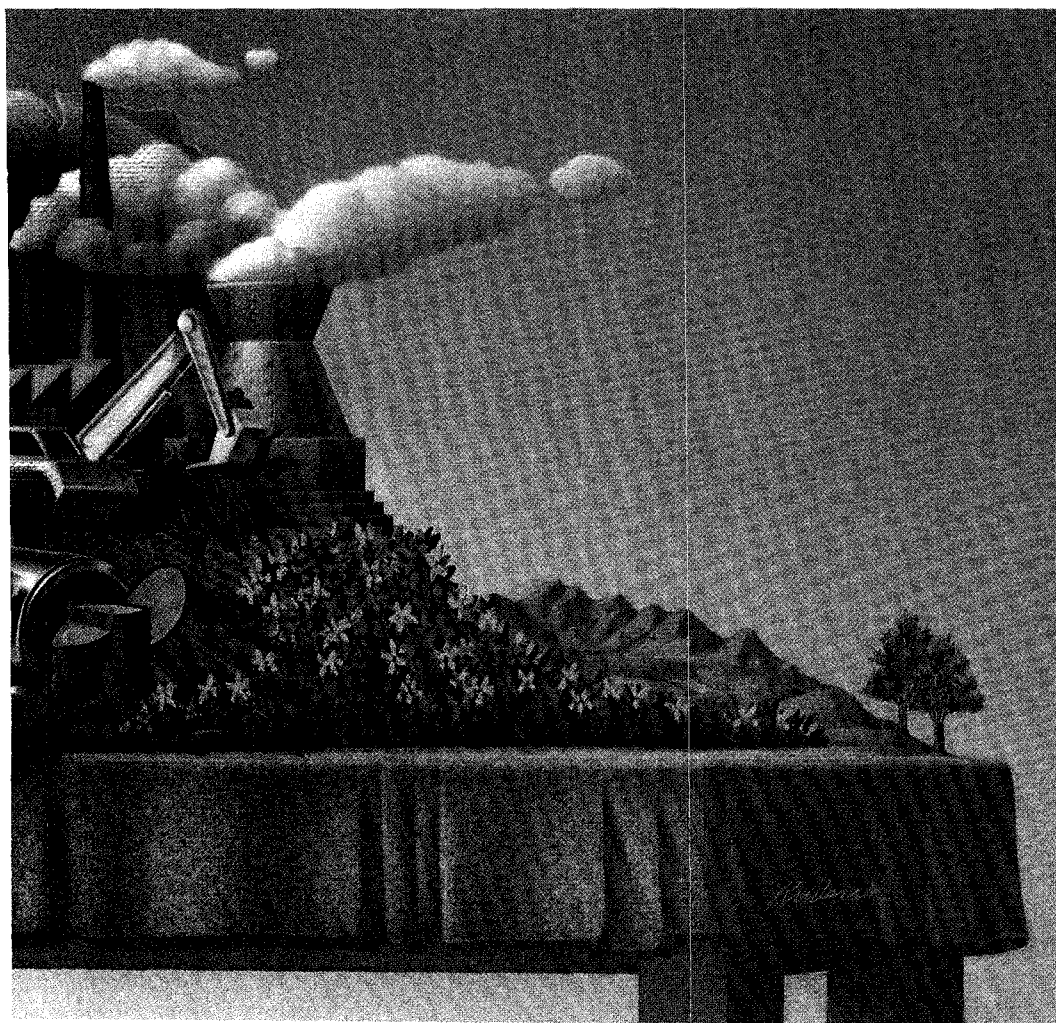
**Overconsumption is only
a moral issue**

"IT is simply wrong to believe that nature sets physical limits to economic growth." Or, as Sagoff put it at another point, "The idea that increasing consumption will inevitably lead to depletion and scarcity, as plausible as it may seem, is mistaken both in principle and in fact."

This statement, Sagoff's core message, misses the point. Since natural resources are finite, increasing consumption

obviously *must* "inevitably lead to depletion and scarcity." Currently there are very large supplies of many mineral resources, including iron and coal. But when they become "depleted" or "scarce" will depend not simply on how much is in the ground but also on the rate at which they can be produced and the amount societies can afford to pay, in standard economic or environmental terms, for their extraction and use.

For most resources, economic and environmental constraints will limit consumption while substantial quantities remain. Long before coal disappears, coal production will probably be limited by the lack of atmospheric capacity to absorb safely more carbon dioxide, the greenhouse gas of which coal burning is an espe-



cially prolific source. For others, however, global “depletion”—that is, decline to a point where worldwide demand can no longer be met economically—is already on the horizon. Petroleum is a textbook example of such a resource. Ironically, Sagoff cites it as a resource that is increasing in abundance, asserting,

Raw materials—including energy resources—are generally more abundant and less expensive today than they were twenty years ago. [In the 1970s] economically recoverable world reserves of petroleum stood at 640 billion barrels. Since that time reserves have *increased* by more than 50 percent, reaching more than 1,000 billion barrels in 1989.

These impressive figures are, unfortunately, figments of the bureaucratic imagination. In an unpublished report Amos Nur, an earth scientist at Stanford University, wrote,

In 1987 . . . there was a sudden boost of reported crude-oil reserves. It turns out that all of this came from Middle Eastern governments: Iraq, Iran, and a few other countries increased their proven reserves by 250 percent overnight! It was not improved technology or new discoveries that led to this; the governments of those countries simply recalculated the volume of recoverable oil in the fields. So ‘proven reserves’ are completely unreliable. What *is* reliable

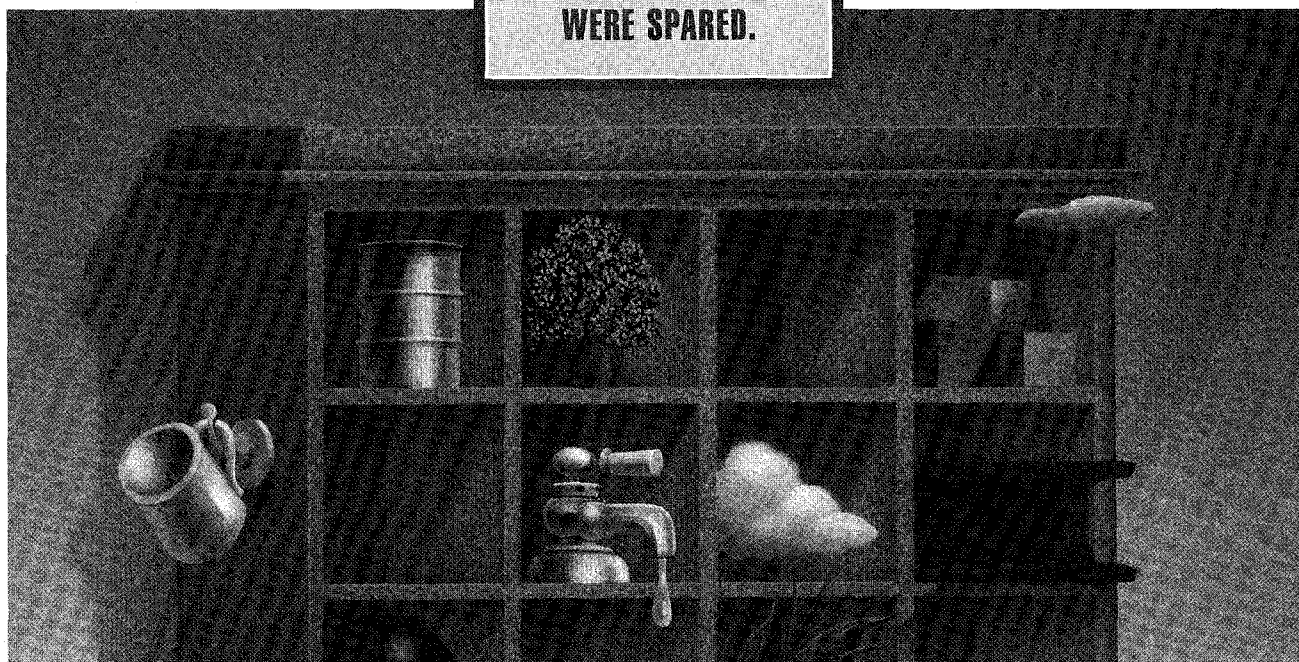
in this business is actual production—and in that regard the United States is well over the peak, and the world as a whole is at the peak right now.

Steps can and should be taken to stretch oil supplies; conservation and improved secondary recovery (extracting oil that remains after standard pumping operations) are the most promising. But conservation is often politically difficult to

sell (especially when prices are kept low), and secondary recovery is expensive and can require large amounts of water, another resource in short supply. In China water is already being forcibly withheld from farmers along the Yellow River in order to flush residual oil from the wells of the Shingle Oil Field Company. But, as Nur emphasizes, even though the last drops of petroleum will never be extracted from the earth, “the supply of oil is truly finite.”

That finitude may actually be a good thing, because—as Sagoff observes, quoting our colleague John Holdren, a professor of environmental policy at Harvard University—the overall problem with energy is not mobilizing enough of it but containing the environmental consequences of its use. Sagoff is right that solar and other technologies hold great promise as replacements for the fossil fuels that may (or, if we’re lucky, may not) be pushing the world toward catastrophically rapid climatic change. But he seems

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oblivious of the timetable for the large-scale replacement of energy technologies. Even if a widespread deployment of new technologies began today, society's dangerous dependence on fossil fuels could not be significantly reduced for many decades; and there is no sign of such deployment. Furthermore, no way of mobilizing energy is free of environmentally damaging side effects, and the uses to which energy from any source is put usually have negative environmental side effects as well. Bulldozers that ran on hydrogen generated by solar power could still destroy wetlands and old-growth forests.

Misconception No. 2:

"In defending old-growth forests, wetlands, or species we make our best arguments when we think of nature chiefly in aesthetic and moral terms"

FEW environmental scientists would dispute the importance of aesthetic and moral arguments in defense of biodiversity—the plants, animals, and microorganisms with which we share the earth. But few indeed would assert that these are the "best" arguments, in light of the materialistic, growth-oriented philosophy that now dominates the planet.

The idea that technology can fully substitute for natural life-support systems recently underwent a damning test in the first Biosphere 2 "mission." Eight people moved into a 3.15-acre closed ecosystem, intending to stay for two years. The \$200-million-plus habitat featured agricultural land, "wetlands," "rain forest," "desert," "savanna," and even a mini-ocean with coral reefs. A sample of biodiversity thought adequate to keep the system functioning was included, and the system was designed to supply the "biospherians" with all basic material needs and more. But comfort was short-lived, and the experiment ended early in failure: atmospheric oxygen concentration had dropped to 14 percent (a level typical of elevations of 17,500 feet); carbon dioxide spiked erratically; nitrous-oxide concentrations rose to levels that can impair brain function; nineteen of twenty-five vertebrate species went extinct; all pollinators went extinct, thereby dooming to eventual extinction most of the plant species; aggressive vines and algal mats overgrew other vegetation and polluted the water; crazy ants, cockroaches, and katydids ran rampant. Not even heroic efforts on the part of the system's desperate inhabitants could suffice to make the system viable.

What went wrong? Evidently more was involved than aesthetic or moral arguments for having the right components of nature in the closed system of Biosphere 2. This is also true in the closed system of the earth as a whole. The biospherians learned a basic lesson the hard way: humanity derives a wide array of crucial economic and life-support benefits from biodiversity and the natural ecosystems in which it exists. Many of these benefits are captured in the term "ecosystem services," which refers to the wide range of

conditions and processes through which natural ecosystems, and the species that are a part of them, sustain and fulfill human life. These services yield ecosystem goods, such as seafood, wild game, forage, timber, biomass fuels, and natural fibers. They also underpin agricultural productivity, the pharmaceutical industry (nine of the top ten pharmaceuticals in the United States are derived from natural sources), and many other aspects of industrial production.

Natural ecosystems perform critical life-support services that make consumption possible and upon which the prosperity of all societies depends. These include the purification of air and water; the mitigation of droughts and floods; the generation and preservation of soils and renewal of their fertility; the detoxification and decomposition of wastes; the pollination of crops and natural vegetation; control of the vast majority of potential agricultural pests; and partial control of climate. This array of services is generated by a complex interplay of natural cycles powered by solar energy and operating across a wide range of space and time scales.

These services operate on such a grand scale, and in such intricate and little-explored ways, that most of them could not be replaced by technology—even if no expense were spared, as Biosphere 2 showed. Ecosystem services are worth trillions of dollars annually, but since they are not traded in economic markets, they do not carry prices. If they did, changes in those prices might serve to alert society to reductions in their supply or to deterioration of the underlying ecological systems that generate them. Moreover, humanity came into being after the underlying systems had been in operation for hundreds of millions to billions of years. Thus it is easy to take ecosystem services for granted and hard to imagine their disruption beyond repair. No one knows precisely which, or approximately how many, species are required to sustain human life; but to say, as Sagoff does, that "there is no credible argument . . . that . . . all or even most of the species we are concerned to protect are essential to the functioning of the ecological systems on which we depend" is dangerously absurd. Until science can say *which* species are essential in the long term, we exterminate *any* at our peril.

Today human activities are driving species extinction at a rate of several species per hour—thousands of times as fast as the rate of evolution of new species. This is akin to popping the rivets out of the airplane your children must fly in. We are entering the first episode of mass extinction in 65 million years—the first ever since human beings came into existence. The consequences for the ecosystem services on which humanity depends could be severe. Recovery from previous mass extinctions—caused by, for example, giant asteroid impacts—took tens of millions of years. Today's mass extinction is driven primarily by the overconsumption of natural habitat and resources, and the toxic by-products of this consumption. The earth could not avoid the path of an asteroid. We can change our consumption patterns.

Misconception No. 3:

Price signals will give warning of disasters

PART of Sagoff's complacency stems from his implicit assumption that price is the same thing as cost, and that price signals will therefore warn of any impending problems. This is a confusion that some ecologists, including Paul Ehrlich, shared a quarter century ago, and one that increasing interactions between ecologists and leading economists have long since dispelled. The price of raw materials often declines as, for example, giant corporations push external costs off onto consumers or indigenous peoples who have little choice but to accept them. The tropical hardwood used in an expensive home does not include in its price the loss of biodiversity in a tropical forest or the carbon dioxide added to the atmosphere as waste wood decayed or was burned and as fossil fuels were used to cut, transport, and process the wood. Also absent from the price are the costs incurred by tropical-forest peoples when their environments and ways of life are destroyed.

External costs are a major reason that price signals are

THE DREAM

I dreamed that you had ceased to love me—
not that you had come from other beds
back to mine, or gone from mine to others,
just that something in your heart had stopped.

I willed myself awake to find you still
beside me. It was just a dream, I thought,
yet when I turned to kiss you, in your eyes
I saw that you had ceased to love me.

I willed myself awake a second time
to find myself alone, as I have been
these many months, but did not know if it
was terror or relief I felt, and whether

dreams unfold the past or make the future
plain. I dreamed that you had ceased to love me,
and know when I see nothing in your eyes
I can't dream myself awake a third time.

—DAVID SOLWAY

unreliable. A good example is the price of gasoline, which carries a social cost of *at least* \$4.00 a gallon but is sold to Americans for \$1.20. Another source of unreliable price signals is perverse government subsidies. In Mexico City the real cost of water may be as high as a dollar per cubic meter, but the government charges only a tenth of that—simultaneously creating an annual deficit for water services of about \$1 billion and hiding the catastrophic state of the city's water supplies. Three separate analyses have estimated that such subsidies cost the global economy some \$500–\$600 billion annually—as much as the Rio Earth Summit's proposed budget for sustainable development. In other words, if subsidies were eliminated, saving the earth would not need to cost the earth.

Misconception No. 4:

Simple extrapolation of past trends provides a clear view of the future

TODAY'S situation is wholly unprecedented. Whereas it took our species hundreds of thousands of years to reach a population of 10 million, we are now adding (net) 10 million people to the planet every six weeks. Whereas in the past human impacts on the environment were local, reversible, and escapable through migration, they are now typically global, irreversible, and inescapable.

- Human-induced land degradation inflicted since the end of the Second World War affects about 40 percent of the planet's vegetated land surface, and the rate of degradation is accelerating nearly everywhere, reducing crop yields and posing a serious threat to agriculture.

- Humanity is overpumping (at rates higher than recharge) groundwater stored during the last glacial period by some trillions of gallons a year. Another ice age will be required to refill some depleted aquifers.

- Humanity is using about 50 percent of accessible freshwater runoff globally. New dam construction could increase this accessible runoff by about 10 percent over the next thirty years, but it won't do so fast enough to keep up with population growth. The number of people is projected to increase by more than 30 percent during that period.

- The burning of fossil fuels, deforestation, paddy rice production, nitrogen-based fertilization, and other routine human activities have possibly changed the composition of the atmosphere enough to induce a devastating pace and magnitude of climate change.

Our generation is supporting itself on a one-time depletion of natural capital. In his optimistic assessment of future food-production possibilities, Sagoff conveniently ignores the depletion of these critical capital inputs into agriculture: biodiversity, ecosystem services, productive land, irrigation water, and favorable weather.

Misconception No. 5:

What's biologically, physically, economically, or politically possible at one place or scale is probable at other places and scales

SAGOFF holds out a few technological advances from around the globe, such as genetically engineered fish, as environmental silver bullets. Although advances in biotechnology are important, proposed dietary or technological fixes for the *world* food problem have proved to be chimeras. We are not feeding the world on plankton, algae farmed on sewage ponds, single-cell proteins from microorganisms grown on petroleum, or meat from whales raised in atolls. The world as a whole has not approached the agricultural productivity of Iowa—nor will it, because the necessary soil quality, climate, and expertise, among other prerequisites, are not universally available.

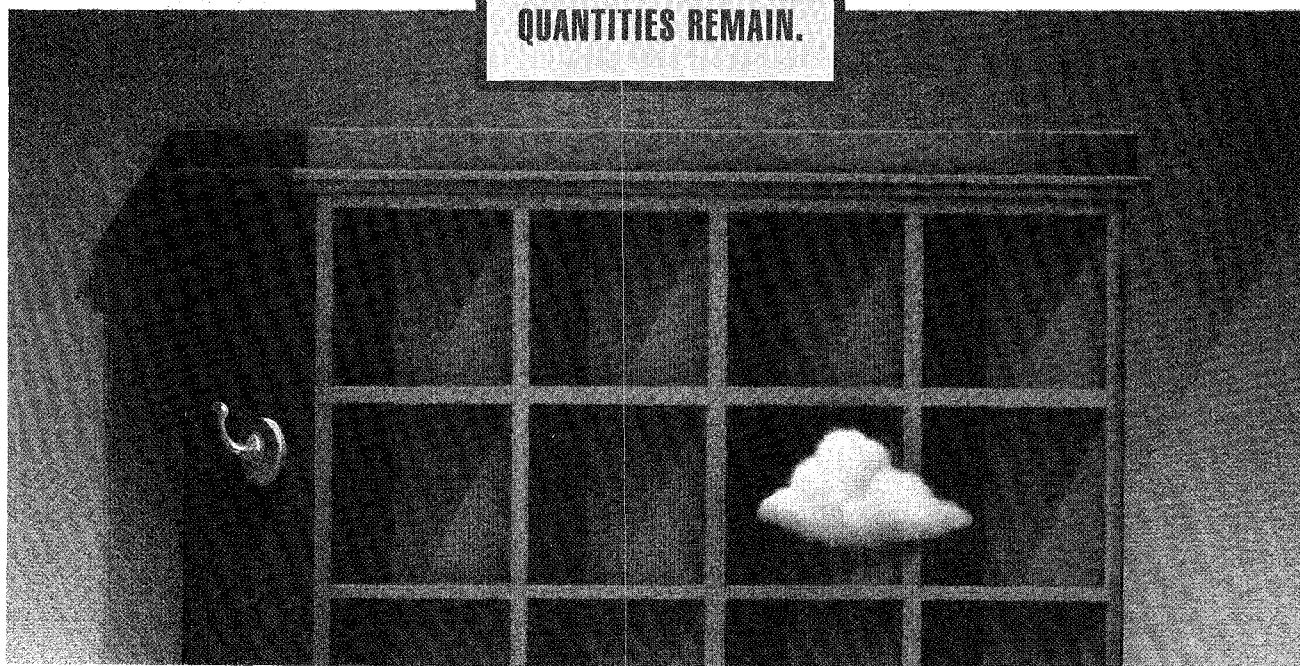
Technological fixes for environmental problems have a mixed record, just as do fixes for food problems. They often work locally or temporarily but prove unworkable on regional or global scales or over the long term. Dumping pollutants in the Mississippi River can solve the disposal problems of those people who are living upstream while

creating an impossible mess for the residents of New Orleans. Air-pollution “control” devices have also often turned out to be a means of shifting pollution to some other place or population. Tall smokestacks tend to convert local air pollution into regional acid rain. Smokestack scrubbers produce cleaner air in exchange for toxic sludge. Can technology reduce the environmental impacts of modern society? Absolutely—but to regard it as the answer to the

threats detailed above ignores the record to date. Remember that the target is moving. If the level of consumption in the developing world should rise to that of North America—which is the trend—under current technologies we would require two additional earths to meet everyone's food and timber needs.

Above all, one must recognize that what is technically and economically feasible is often sociopolitically impossible. People consider many technological “solutions” (the widespread use of nuclear power, for example) to be unacceptable, often because they do not trust the political entities that propose to manage the technologies safely for the benefit of all. Many ordinary citizens have come to the same conclusion that the distinguished demographer Nathan Keyfitz claimed as a finding of the social sciences: “If we have one piece of empirically backed knowledge, it is that bad policies are widespread and persistent.”

**SINCE NATURAL
RESOURCES ARE
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LIMIT CONSUMPTION
WHILE SUBSTANTIAL
QUANTITIES REMAIN.**



Misconception No. 6:

The North doesn't exploit the South and economic growth saves the environment

THERE is much more to exploitation than is subsumed under trade in natural resources. Exploitation is a complex subject, but in a world in which huge international disparities in wealth and power persist, the rich-poor gap is increasing. In 1960 the ratio of the income of the richest 20 percent of humanity to that of the poorest 20 percent was 30:1; according to the United Nations *Human Development Report 1997*, it was nearly 80:1 in 1994. And the rich show pathetically little interest in closing that gap. Since 1950 the richest fifth of humankind has doubled its per capita consumption of energy, meat, timber, steel, and copper, and quadrupled its car ownership, greatly increasing global emissions of CFCs and greenhouse gases, accelerating tropical deforestation, and intensifying other environmental impacts. The poorest fifth of humankind has increased its per capita consumption hardly at all. Indeed, those in the poorest fifth average a cash income of less than a dollar a day, and those in the next fifth average only three dollars a day. This means that 40 percent of humankind accounts for a mere 6.5 percent of the world's income.

With only 4.5 percent of the world's population, the United States uses about 25 percent of the earth's resources and contributes more than 20 percent of global emissions of carbon dioxide—the atmospheric pollutant that accounts for about half of global warming. In 1996 the United States contributed one fifth more carbon to everybody's atmosphere than did China, which is 4.5 times as populous. The poor will be affected by global warming whether they are major or minor sources of carbon dioxide. The winds carry no passports.

Promoting intensive cash-crop industrial farming techniques, in which the overuse of fertilizers and the broadcast use of pesticides replace more ecologically sound food-crop agriculture, is another form of exploitation—and one of the chief generators of the displaced peasants that Sagoff cites as a major cause of deforestation. But in Indonesia and Malaysia, the two most forested countries of Southeast Asia, where forests are disappearing fastest, logging by large corporations and clearing to create oil-palm plantations are the prime causes of deforestation. The logging is pursued in no small part to meet rich-world demand for specialty hardwoods at prices that are very far from reflecting the costs entailed. Recently the independent London-based Environmental Investigation Agency asserted that the \$100 billion timber industry is “out of control,” threatening “the extermination of most of the world's species and massive social and economic disturbance.” Similarly, fish farming, which Sagoff sees as the solution to the decline of oceanic fish-

eries, is fine for supplying salmon or shrimp to the rich. But those salmon and shrimp, at \$7–\$15 a pound, are far out of reach for poor people making less than \$2,000 a year, who once depended on indigenous fisheries for the protein in their diets.

The claim that economic growth and prosperity are a cure for environmental degradation is arguable. It is based largely on the “Kuznets curves” observed in some forms of pollution. When the amount of pollution is plotted against per capita GNP, an inverted U curve is produced. As economic activity grows, pollution first increases. Then, presumably because an increased concern for environmental amenities appears when basic needs are satisfied, pollution control is implemented and pollution decreases. Prosperity thus saves the environment. Unfortunately, such Kuznets curves are of limited application. Economic growth has helped to mitigate some kinds of air and water pollution, but production of many of the most important pollutants, among them carbon dioxide, keeps right on rising with prosperity.

Why Worry About the Muddled Middle?

“MIDDLE ground” pronouncements on the debate between cornucopians and the environmental scientists who understand the deteriorating state of our life-support systems are counterproductive in solving the human predicament. They obviously encourage those who wish to continue humanity's current trajectory, for whatever motives. For our part, until a systematic analysis shows the Nobel laureate economist James Meade to be wrong, we'll continue to agree with his assessment:

Pollution and the exhaustion of natural resources depend and will depend in the future on the absolute level of total economic activity. This means that it is necessary to restrain both the rate of growth of population and, at least in the developed countries, the rate of growth of consumption per head.

Restraining the growth of consumption does not mean going back to living in caves and cooking over buffalo-chip fires. For decades in the rich nations increased consumption has not been correlated with increased satisfaction, and perpetuating Third World poverty is a luxury that the prosperous can no longer afford. Greatly enhanced efficiency, reduced consumption among today's superconsumers, more-sensible choices of energy technologies, and a halt to population growth followed by a gradual decline might, as John Holdren and others have clearly shown, lead to a closing of the rich-poor gap without an ecological collapse. Over the next century, with careful planning, mutual trust, and cooperation, humanity could create a sustainable global society with a higher quality of life for everyone. ☸



The remarkable thing is, you can't even see it from the narrow stretch of highway that takes you there. Instead, you are struck only by the rich green hue of the surrounding hills for which the town was named.

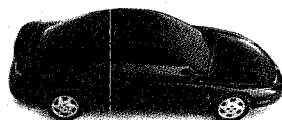
In short, it's about as far removed as you can get from how anyone might picture the setting for a car factory.

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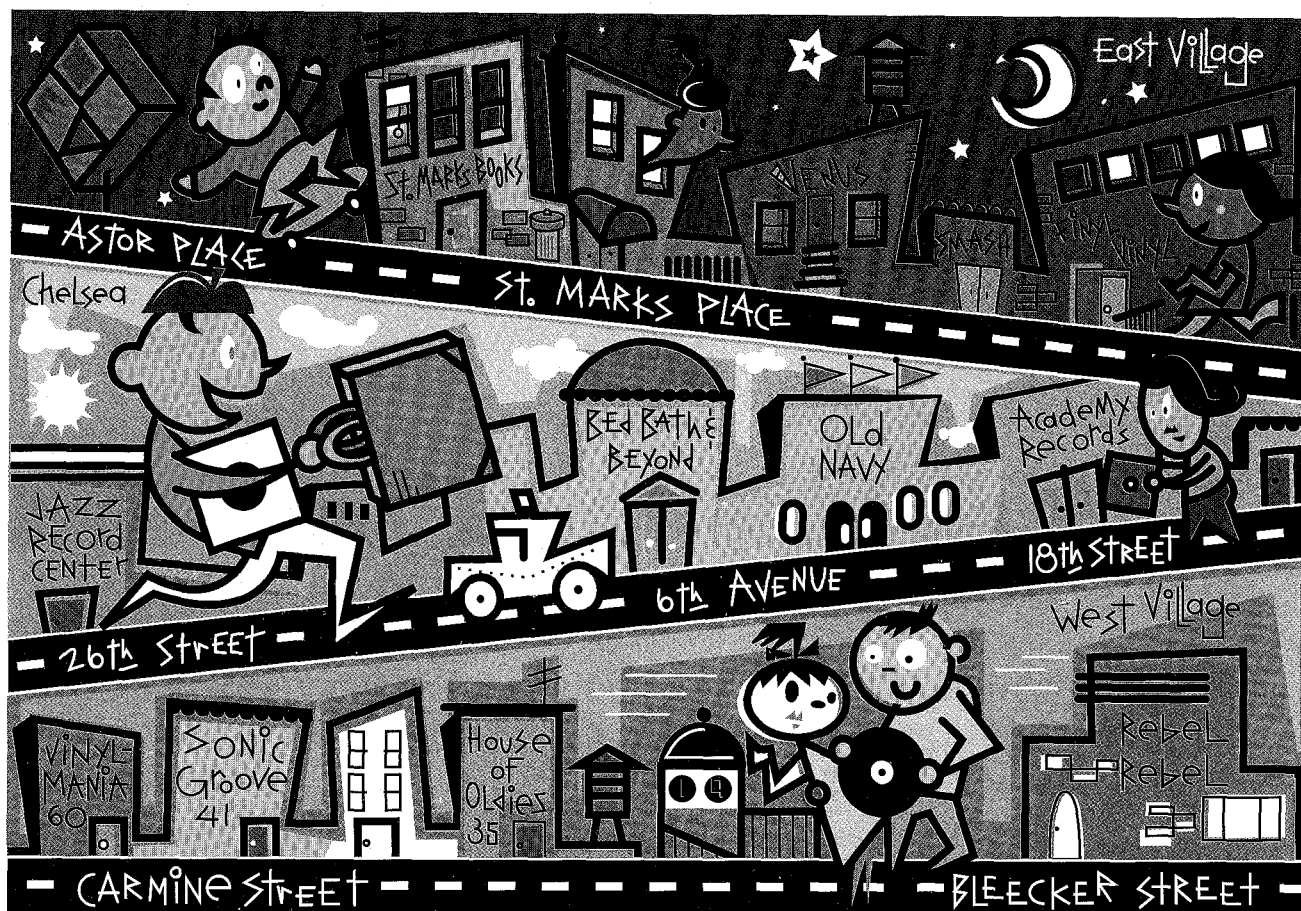


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All Sales Are Vinyl

*Shopping for LPs in
the many villages of downtown
New York City*

I SUFFER from periodic and irrepressible urges for vinyl. I'm referring to long-playing records, of course. Many knowledgeable audiophiles choose LPs when music hangs in the balance. In fact, there's an entire audiophile cult built around the belief that vinyl is superior to the CD. Many people like me bow deeply before its inherent beauty, naturalness, and musicality. If vinyl's charms elude you, consider the vast number of recordings as yet unreleased on CD.

In a surprising twist, nearly fifteen

years after the introduction of the CD there are more, and better, high-end turntables to choose from than ever before, including exotic and super-expensive European models and affordable entry-level tables from companies as close to home as VPI, in New Jersey—not to mention the dreaded but ubiquitous Technics 1200 Mk.II, may it rest in pieces.

Records are, of course, de rigueur with the trance, rave, ambient, hip-hop, trip-hop generation. Perhaps its members are attracted by vinyl's enjoyably

tactile elements, such as the liner notes. With most CDs you need an electron microscope to read the fine print.

With vinyl in mind, then, let me invite you to join my wife, Kathleen, and me on a record-hunting tour through Greenwich Village. Here's the plan: Persuade your loved ones to join you. Entice them with Filene's, Old Navy, and the huge, block-long Bed Bath & Beyond, all in the West Village. Then deftly switch over with tales of quirky little shops in the heart of the East Village, near Tompkins Square Park.

WE begin our record crawl well off the beaten path, at A Classical Record, 547 West Twenty-seventh Street, Suite 680, between Tenth and Eleventh Avenues. This cavernous place, stuffed with LPs beyond number, is an essential resource for well-heeled classical-music collectors. Albert ten Brink, the owner, has developed a devoted following from around the world which pays astronomical prices for collectible LPs. Prices start at about \$15 and run to hundreds and

by Jonathan Scull

Illustration by Jane Sanders

DECEMBER 1997

even thousands of dollars. As you might imagine, Ten Brink spends much time doing business on the phone (and by E-mail; his address is aclassrec@aol.com). He is fluent in all aspects of classical repertoire, and becomes especially lyrical when discussing flamenco.

Rather surprisingly, there is a modest outpost of culture nearby: the Dia Center for the Arts, at 548 West Twenty-second Street, at the West Side Highway. Call (212-989-5912) before visiting for information on current exhibitions. Regular gallery-goers will be aware that West Twenty-second and Twenty-third Streets are also thick with contemporary-art galleries.

Moving south and east, we arrive at another important resource for the serious vinyl seeker: the Jazz Record Center, at 236 West Twenty-sixth Street, Room 804, between Seventh and Eighth Avenues. You might say that the Jazz Record Center is heritage preserved. Fred Cohen, the owner, tends his vinyl with care, dedication, and deep personal knowledge. All the LPs are poly-bagged, graded, and arranged by artist and label. A selection of books and printed materials accompanies the vast expanse of LPs. Average prices for vinyl hover around \$10 to \$15. CDs are available, but they are kept in black boxes in the middle room (very apropos, I think).

During a brief conversation not long ago Cohen confirmed my impression that LPs are no longer disappearing at the alarming rate that applied only a few years ago. America (that's New York, right?) seems finally to have discovered its vinyl self. The Japanese are major buyers, as they have been for some time, Cohen says, but his customers include a growing number of Europeans, particularly German and French. "The largest retailers have been forced to acknowledge that they can't get rid of vinyl like they wanted to," he told me.

Culturally there's not much happening around the Jazz Record Center, but a brisk walk down Sixth Avenue in the mid-Twenties will bring you to what remains of the Flower District. Continuing south and a bit east, we come upon Academy Records & CDs, at 12 West Eighteenth Street, between Fifth and Sixth. The shop specializes in classical music, in all forms; it does sell CDs, but LPs are the big draw. Many records are

poly-bagged, all are marked with the price, and they're generally in excellent condition. You can spot the true vinyl-committed at Academy by the fixed look in their eyes.

The store has a comprehensive jazz section, where I always enjoy grazing. Last time I visited, I snagged a copy of *Francis A. & Edward K.* on Warner/Reprise: The Chairman and The Duke, recorded in Hollywood on Sinatra's birthday in 1967. I'm no special admirer of Hoboken's first son, but this charming, upbeat album, featuring Sinatra and Ellington, is a winner.

While you're being generous to yourself at Academy, your companions might visit any number of happening places nearby, including Academy's own book department, just next door. A few blocks away they can dip into discounted glitz at Loehmann's, now firmly ensconced in the old Barney's Seventh Avenue frontage (Oh, how the mighty . . .). Or they can try the bustling Housing Works Thrift Shop, just across the street at 143 West Seventeenth, with its imaginative window displays; there's even a lowly shelf of LPs in the back—lots of Barry Manilow and Bette Midler, for those with a taste for such things.

Chelsea (or the Photo District, as it is also known), especially Sixth Avenue between Seventeenth and Twentieth, has become convulsed with frenetic shoppers. The weekends have been wild since Old Navy and Bed Bath & (way) Beyond opened. The BB&B building also houses Filene's Basement and T. J. Maxx, with Today's Man directly across the street. Feeling literary? Try Barnes & Noble, just a few blocks up Sixth, which also sells CDs at what look to be list prices. Crossing over to Fifth Avenue, in the Flatiron District, your companions can spend some time at Matsuda, Emporio Armani, Paul Smith, Banana Republic, the Gap, and Daffy's Discount Clothing.

If your stomach begins to growl, I've got just the place: the Petite Abeille Belgian Café, at 107 West Eighteenth, on the corner of Sixth Avenue. Three Belgian brothers have set up a little corner of the old country right in the middle of commercial-beyond-belief Sixth. A statue of Hergé's beloved cartoon character Tintin guards the door, though there's no sign of Snowy or Professor Calculus. The waffles are flown in directly from

Oh, the Possibilities!



There are so many possible choices to fill your cup. A can of pre-ground coffee? A well-aged bag of beans from supermarket shelves? Perhaps some indifferently roasted beans whose potential has been squandered along the way? *Don't do it!* Don't waste time and money on coffee that leaves your palate cold.

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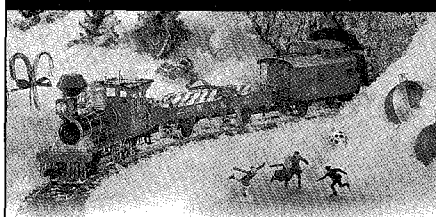


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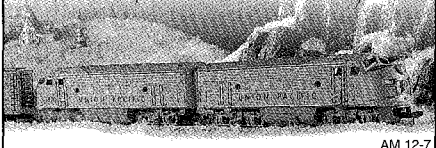
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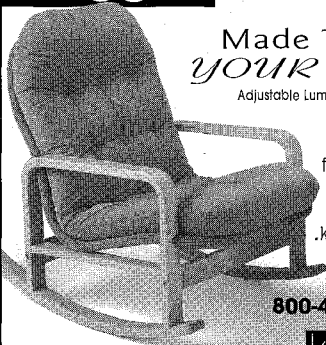
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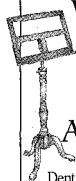
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home, along with a selection of very fine dark chocolates. It's small, and it has been discovered.

THE West Village vinyl scene seems never to change. The record shops just keep chugging along, year after year. Bleecker Bob's Golden Oldies, for instance, at 118 West Third Street, specializes in rare rock, jazz, funk, and exotica. Then there's Rebel Rebel, at 319 Bleecker, half a block from Christopher Street, which offers a roughly 50:50 ratio of LPs to CDs, including lots of imports, twelve-inch dance singles, and "house" music (techno-dance) from Europe and the United States. Record Runner, at 5 Jones Street, between Bleecker and West Fourth, specializes in contemporary pop; CDs are taking over, but there is still vinyl to be had. Just up the street, at 22 Jones, is Strider Records, which caters to the classic-rock crowd and also sells R&B, soul, country-western, and pop soundtracks for good measure.

Nearby Carmine Street is a hotbed of vinyl, beginning with the House of Oldies, at No. 35, where the 1950s through the 1980s reign supreme. "Everything but classical and opera," Bob Abramson, chief oldie, says. "No CDs, no tapes, just records!" Sonic Groove is at No. 41 (the Web address is www.sonicgroove.com) and sells, its business card says, "futuristic electronic, techno, underground dance, club, house, classic house [!], trip-hop, and breakbeat." The DJ, making me dizzy as he bobbed to the beat behind the counter, told me that vinyl outsells CDs about forty to one there. Vinylmania, at 60 Carmine, has dance, trip-hop, acid jazz, and R&B on the menu of mayhem. Not far away, at 5 Cornelia Street, Michael Carlucci vends both LPs and CDs at Subterranean Records; he admits that he's partial to vinyl. The wide range of music to choose from includes jazz, R&B, and classic and alternative rock. The always bustling junction of Carmine, Bleecker, and West Fourth Streets at Sixth Avenue is tightly packed with shops, restaurants, and coffee shops. Step lively and keep your hand on your wallet.

As you move into the East Village,

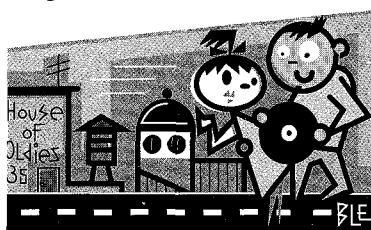
it's difficult to avoid Tower Records, at Broadway and East Fourth Street. Go if you must, but I prefer the Tower Clearance Outlet, at East Fourth and Lafayette. There are copious amounts of "cut-out" classical vinyl, ranging in price from \$1.99 to \$5.99.

Just across from the outlet you will find Other Music, at 15 East Fourth Street. I knew it had possibilities when we walked in and heard Kraftwerk, the seventies German avant-garde techno band, playing. *Saturday Night Live's* Dieter might have been an acolyte: Now is the time on Sprockets when we dance . . . This relatively large store seems to be a distillation of the East Village new-music scene, tarted up, sanitized, and marketed to the New York University-Canal Jeans crowd. Attempting to engage one of the counterpersons in conversation elicited only a bad case of attitude.

Farther over in the East Village they'll talk your ear off, even if you are middle-aged, pudgy, and not particularly pierced. And if your companions include anyone who is pierced, head to Eightball Records, at 105 East Ninth Street, between Third and Fourth Avenues. Dance and house predominate. Eightball draws both DJs and their ambient dance victims. This is an altogether slick operation, with an attractive art-directed catalogue offering music, outerwear, and accessories. (It's on the Web at www.eightball.com.)

Finyl Vinyl, another perennial LP wateringhole, has moved nearby, to 204 East Sixth Street, just east of Cooper Square and NYU. The racks are filled with jazz, blues, seventies funk, rock, roots of rock, rock-a-billy, country, R&B, gospel, *British Invasion*, and more. (Is there more?) Prices range from \$4.99 to \$20 or more for domestic records and European imports. Collectibles and Japanese vinyl run \$20 and up—not the cheapest place around, but worth a visit.

Also nearby is Downtown Music Gallery, at 211 East Fifth Street, just east of Third Avenue. It offers a large collection of rock and world music, with small electronic and classical sections at the



rear. The jazz reissue bins are well stocked and reasonably priced; original releases can be a bit more expensive. Call Bruce Lee Gallanter (212-473-0043), the owner, for a copy of his electronic newsletter, and check for dates and times of live-music events planned for in-store performance.

IN the mood for a brisk walk? I thought so. Let's begin our far-east meandering at Adult Crash, located in the perceptual heart of the East Village, at 66 Avenue A, between Fourth and Fifth Streets. The storefront is a bit obscure, but seek it out: I consider this one of the most sophisticated places in town. The owners, Tim Jackson and Carolyn Schmitt, say that they're more mission-driven than other dealers. My first, quick visual sweep of the place took in album covers from Pierre Henry and John Cage, Terry Riley, Patti Smith, and Stereolab. The selection of music, in both LP and CD, is assembled with impeccable taste and style in bins labeled strange, triphop, Satie & Cage, techno, ambient, prepunk, no-wave, Throbbing Gristle, and exotica.

Your next stop might be around the corner, at the A-1 Record Shop, 439 East Sixth Street, between First Avenue and Avenue A, where "all sales are vinyl." There's lots of club, dance, soul, and world music, but it's the unique and well-stocked jazz section that empties my wallet. "I've never heard of half these Hank Crawford titles," Dan Billet, a jazz aficionado of our long acquaintance, who was along for the browsing, said enthusiastically. "All the classic, early recordings . . ." His voice trailed off as he bent over another bin. A couple of turntables up front keep both shoppers and staff hopping: management will be only too happy to audition a cut or two from that vinyl clutched tightly to your chest. You can let go now.

I checked the prices in the pre-1965 jazz section. Original Verves, Riversides, Prestiges, and Blue Notes in generally good condition were marked at \$20 and up. I set aside an OJC (Original Jazz Classic) re-release of *Milt Jackson 'Live' at the Village Gate* on Riverside for \$8.

Let me suggest keeping an eye out for the entire OJC catalogue, whose titles are relatively inexpensive—\$6 to \$10 or so on LP, and a bit more for CD. These are, for the most part, creditable remasterings of the highly prized originals.

I also found an early original Riverside with Cannonball Adderley and Milt Jackson, called *Things Are Getting Better*, reasonably priced at \$20. Steve, the tall expat Brit behind the counter, is generally disinclined to bargain, but at most stores a small discount can be had. And don't be tripped up by what I might call "label mystique." At \$3 to \$12 for most used records—as little as fifty cents at thrift shops and flea markets—it's painless to experiment.

That said, understand that to get the best out of vinyl you must clean it thoroughly. You'll be amazed at how quiet the surface of a sad, dusty old LP can be after a proper scrubbing. The Disc Doctor Miracle Record Cleaner and brushes (\$45) and the Orbitrac 2 (\$35) are available from Music Direct, at 800-449-8333. Or you can spend \$100 to almost \$1,000 for professional cleaning machines from such audiophile companies as Nitty Gritty and VPI, which will apply a special cleaning fluid, scrub it down into the groove, and then vacuum up the resultant goop. It's *au revoir* to snap, crackle, and pop. Then, too, some of today's stylus designs (the "needle," for you analogue neophytes) are so incredibly narrow that they track below many surface scratches. Over time you'll learn what records that can successfully be rejuvenated look like.

I predict that you'll spend some time at A-1, so a diversion will be necessary for fidelity companions. Send them to Little Rickie's, at 49 1/2 First Avenue, at the corner of

Third Street, a glittering treasure chest of a novelty shop for kids of all ages. The shelves are stuffed with Pez dispensers, hysterical greeting cards, Elvis paraphernalia, mutant fridge magnets, outrageous rings, cuff links, hats, and funny T-shirts. Alphabets is another humorous-goods emporium, at 115 Avenue A, between Seventh and Eighth Streets,



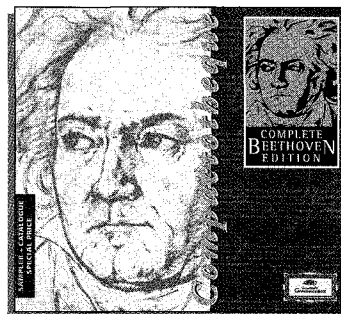
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just around the corner from A-1. It's really two stores: T-shirts, rubber thingies, wind-up toys, and other amusing novelty items on the right side, and watches, books, notebooks, and high-tech personal objects on the left. From time to time Kathleen buys fragrant and sensuous incense from Japan or France here. I bought a rubber stamp with the legend "Art is anything you can get away with."

If novelties aren't the ticket, fashion victims will enjoy Tokyo 7, at 64 East Seventh Street, between First and Second. Kathleen's attention was caught outside this small consignment shop by a sign offering Yamamoto, Gaultier, and Moschino at \$99 to \$150. Or try Tokyo Joe's, a consignment store a few blocks up, at 334 East Eleventh Street, between First and Second.

Another favorite place of ours is Tompkins Square Books & Records, at 111 East Seventh Street, between First and A. It's a prototypical East Village shop, stacked with books beyond number to the left and thousands of records on the right. I usually cruise the art books and hunt for vinyl while Kathleen heads for the foreign-language texts. The LP pickings are hit-and-miss here, but there are plenty of bargains to be had. The shop doesn't specialize, as most do these days, so you'll find a mixture of jazz, vocals, show, rock, spoken word, classical, opera, world, and country music. It's best to avoid attracting attention when record hunting, so that no one will notice as you hyperventilate upon finding a cache of desirable RCA Living Stereo "Shaded Dogs" for a buck a pop. Gani Remorca, the soft-spoken proprietor at Tompkins Square, keeps an ancient stereo on hand to allow customers to listen before buying. The quarter taped to the headshell—a trick to keep the stylus of a cheap cartridge in the groove—makes me hesitate to go beyond a quick test, though.

Diagonally across the street, at 122 East Seventh, you'll find Stooz Records, which specializes in rock, soul, funk, and jazz and offers a fine selection of used vinyl and contemporary CDs at decent prices. When I'm look-

ing for the latest release by Lou Reed, Laurie Anderson, or Smashing Pumpkins at a less-than-major-outlet price, I cruise to Stooz.

If your stomach demands attention, hop over to Pommes Frites, at 123 Second Avenue, near Seventh Street, for "authentic Belgian fries cooked twice to crisp golden perfection." Smother them with exotic toppings, or try the house frite sauce from the Netherlands. Perfection in a fry—it's to die.

NINTH Street between Second and First Avenues is a microcosm of the entire East Village. Breakbeat Science, at 335 East Ninth, is America's first drum 'n' bass store. It advertises jungle, breakbeat, and trip-hop. "Jungle" turns out to be dance music played exclusively on drum and bass. The youth lounging behind the counter explained to us, "The music comes direct from London. It's a new form of dance where you move to the rhythm rather than the drum-

beat. Of course, it's a fairly subtle thing." Of course.

For a dose of daring and style in women's clothing, try Horn, at 328 East Ninth. As you step in, you'll notice that

the floor is covered with medium-sized smooth white stones. "It slows people down," the chic one behind the counter said. The elegance is palpable. At 335 East Ninth is a shop called simply H, for Craig Higgins, the owner, who travels widely and returns bearing an eclectic assortment of unexpected objects. Kathleen was tempted by a suite of mirrors taken from a Chinese cruise ship of the mid-1930s, for \$158 each; I was somewhat less tempted by a basket full of huge black spiders encased in amber. We walked out with an 1890 Edison Repro Bulb for around \$20, which now softly illuminates the entrance to our loft.

Two record shops on the next block, between First and A, are worth visiting. Rich Kim, the owner of Etherea, at 441 East Ninth, describes the ratio of CDs to LPs sold as about 50:50; he prefers the warmer sound of vinyl. Although Kim specializes in new music, his store also keeps a well-stocked classic-jazz sec-



tion. That evening he had just put out a sizable number of OJCs: bug-eyed with anticipation, I riffled through the bins, and was relieved to see most of them tagged at \$8.98, a fair price. I went crazy. I grabbed Monk with Coltrane; Kenny Burrell and Coltrane; Red Garland with the Trane and Don Byrd; Art Farmer's *Farmer's Market*; Gene Ammons with Don Byrd, Jackie McLean, and Mal Waldron; Clark Terry with Monk; and Dexter Gordon's *Tower of Power!* The prize find was "*The Timekeepers*": *Count Basie Meets Oscar Peterson*, on Pablo. Look for Pablos, which deliver more quality for the analogue buck than practically any other jazz label.

A little farther down the block, at 445 East Ninth, lurks a record store called Strange?, where you'll find more new music on both CD and LP. Here it has a UK twist. A block to the south Accidental CD, Records and Tapes spills out onto the sidewalk at 131 Avenue A, between Eighth and Ninth Streets. The vinyl's inside, it's mostly rock, and the place is open twenty-four hours a day. (Believe me, that's the principal draw.) Speaking of rock, let's consider Dance Tracks, at 91 East Third Street, between First and Second. Tracks is entirely DJ-oriented. In fact, there's always a DJ on duty, keeping the vinyl—and the customers—thumpin' and jumpin'. Kids will love it. The huge, overwhelming bass will vibrate your liver. However, there are a couple of very comfortable leather couches on which to sit and rest middle-aged feet. Did I mention wearing comfortable shoes?

NOW for St. Marks Place—Eighth Street east of Third Avenue. Kathleen and I enjoy cruising its streets at night; the vibe is soporific. If we're heading into the Village late in the day, we might rendezvous at St. Marks Books, at 31 Third Avenue at Ninth Street, a fine place to pass a few bookish hours. The clerks coyly leave freakish and wildly visual large-format volumes out to catch the eye of browsing customers.

Kim's Video & Music, at 6 St. Marks Place, between Third and Second Avenues, stocks a lot of bleeding-edge new-music offerings from bands well known and not. Some of the cover art is positively scary. There are quite a few

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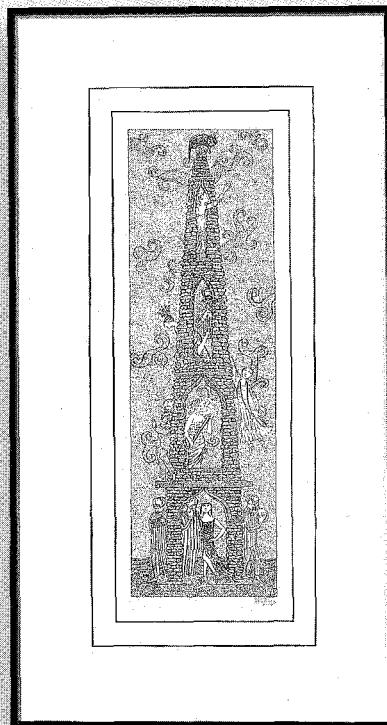
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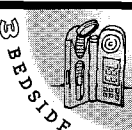
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import LPs on the shelves, but most releases are on CD. You might pop into Venus Records, at 13 St. Marks, whose basement is filled with vinyl, or Smash Compact Disc, at 33 St. Marks, for alternative and mainstream rock, most of it on CD. Continuing down Eighth Street, turn right on Second Avenue and head for Sixth Street and you'll suddenly find yourself in Little India. There are scads of ethnic restaurants to choose from, their waiters stationed outside urging in the passersby.

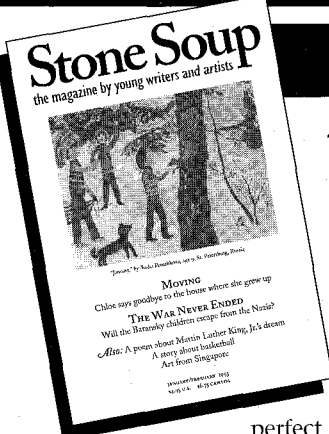
The last two stores are outside the heart of the East Village. The doyen of Village LP venues is Footlight Records, at 113 East Twelfth Street, between Fourth and Third Avenues. (Find it at www.footlight.com, or send E-mail to Footlight1@aol.com.) Show music is the name of the game here: the store offers a finely graded selection of the genre in its many forms. The catalogue lists English, French, Italian, and Japanese cast albums, among others, and also male and female vocals, composer and theme collections, and television. How about a CD of the "Original Takarazuka cast recording" of *West Side Story*, a Japanese import at \$35.95, with an all-female ensemble? There's also an excellent but small selection of international and folk music, and, happily, more jazz to choose from than ever. The LPs are poly-bagged and generally in perfect condition; prices range from moderate to high, but are mostly within reason.

The other shop that deserves mention is Throb, at 211 East Fourteenth Street, between Second and Third Avenues, mostly because the owner, Aldo Hernández, told me he's single and looking for a date. No, really. He was the funniest and most charming of all the vinyl people we met, and believe me, some of them can be pretty strange. He specializes in that jungle stuff again, but also features trip-hop, rave, ambient, techno, and lounge-core sixties music.

So there you have it. Bring a leather or canvas bag to contain all the vinyl goodies. A few packets of those pre-moistened towelettes might prove handy for a quick freshening up after rooting around in the bins for a while. I've taken to stashing them about my person in the event I happen on an unexpected cache of LPs. Isn't unexpected discovery half the fun? ☺

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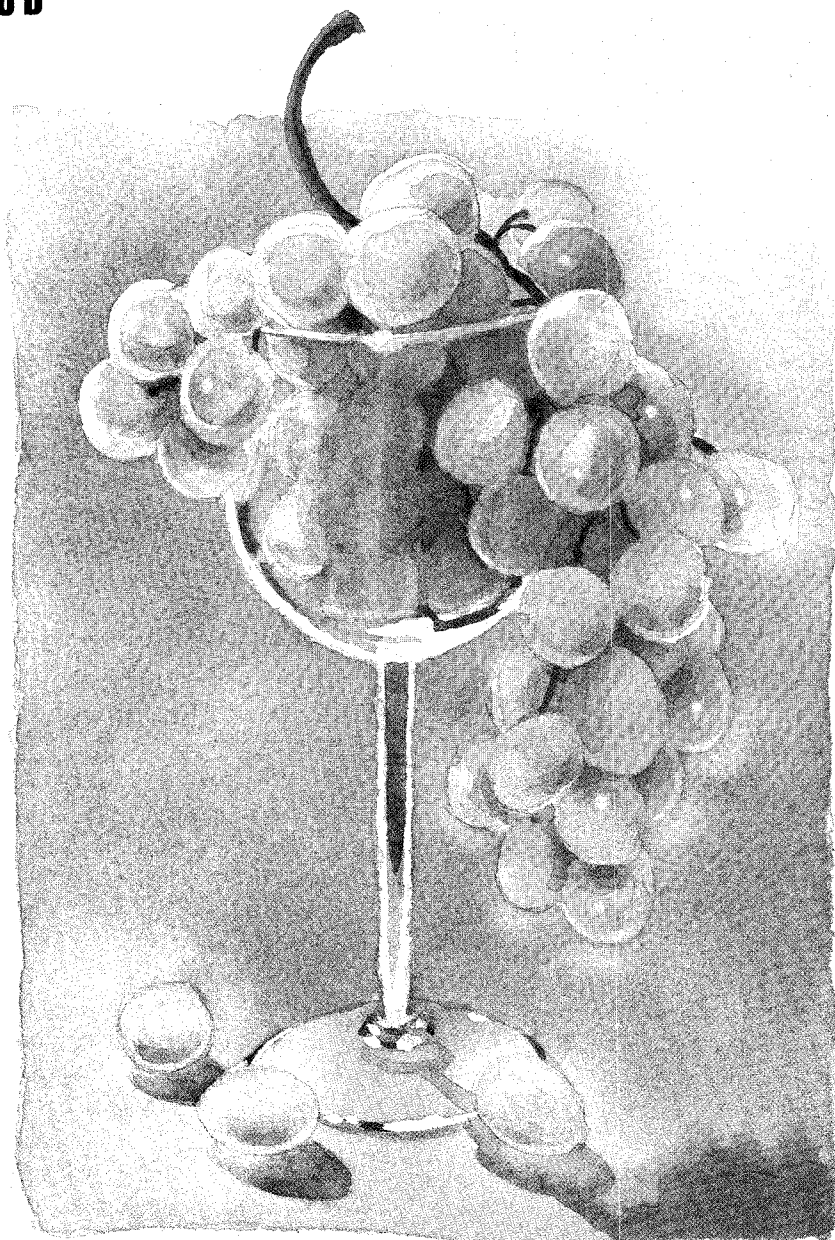
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EVERY so often in the fall I find muscat grapes at the fruit market. Big, round, firm, and juicy, they taste like no other grape: honeyed, with the bright, sweet taste of citrus and peach. They are to Thompson seedless—the ubiquitous green grapes—what small, spicy Seckel pears

by Corby Kummer

are to vapid Bartletts, what lush fresh figs are to, say, underripe apricots. The name is probably related to “musk,” because muscats, which may be the most ancient cultivated grape family, are so heavily perfumed. The grapes that are generally referred to as “muscat” at fruit markets—actually a

cross between a kind of muscat and another grape—were developed in Italy early in this century and given a name that presaged their status as the country’s most esteemed (and, usually, most expensive) table grape: Italia. Today growers of table grapes in both Italy and California favor Italia over true muscat for its bigger, hardier, prettier bunches; virtually all commercially grown muscats are either crushed for wine or dried for raisins.

Still, Italia grapes amply suggest muscats’ intensity. Every so often a bunch, especially an imported one, will have dark-green, almost translucent skins streaked with yellow-gold. The flavor of even one of these grapes is so powerful that I close my eyes while the taste fills my mouth.

Once the season is over (the harvest usually ends in September, but growers with plenty of storage space ship Italia grapes almost through Christmas), I can satisfy my longing with one of the many dessert wines made from muscats. The first I ever tasted was Beaumes-de-Venise, named for a French town in the Rhône Valley. So entranced was I by its intensity that I drank and drank, unaware that the wine is so sweet because it is “fortified”—the fermentation is arrested early with the addition of distilled spirits, before yeasts can consume all the sugar. My shaky perambulation the following day ensured that I would remember the wine.

In Italy I discovered a wine I could drink a lot of without feeling any effects—a fizzy wine so fresh and low in alcohol that it is sometimes dismissed as being only for old ladies and children. Moscato d’Asti does not deserve to be maligned. It may not be as complex as champagne or similar sparkling wines, but it is wonderfully direct. Named for a city and province in Piedmont, in northern Italy, moscato d’Asti is often the basis for the more alcoholic, fizzier, and less distinctively flavored Asti spumante, commonly an industrial product.

True moscato d’Asti, best drunk almost as soon as it is bottled, is hard to find in this country. I particularly like that of I Vignaioli di Santo Stefano, in a sixties-style bottle shaped like a baseball

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bat, which I can occasionally find here. Guests are at first puzzled and then delighted by a drink that looks like champagne but is much friendlier. The hint of pear in its flavor makes moscato d'Asti a perfect match for a pear-and-almond tart; more generally, it complements anything with apples, pears, or almonds (including my always-on-hand dessert, biscotti).

For almost seventy years the Louis M. Martini winery, in the Napa Valley of California, has made America's closest equivalent to the Italian moscato d'Asti, moscato amabile, the acquisition of which has become a crusade. It is sold only at the winery and must be continuously refrigerated, lest the yeast remaining at the bottom of the bottle be reactivated by warm temperatures and produce enough additional carbon dioxide to push out the cork. (The glass is thick and won't shatter, and the flavor will only become more complex, but the "goo," as Michael Martini, the winemaker, calls it, will be extensive.) The alcohol level, around five or six percent, is almost as low as that of most beer, and the fizz, which is completely natural, is very gentle. The wine is as amiable as the name, although in Italy *amabile* is a technical term meaning medium-sweet. Even sophisticated fellow winemakers line up to buy Martini's moscato amabile, which, being more or less homemade, follows its own schedule. One year's bottling usually vanishes well before the next year's is ready.

Other American winemakers have fallen in love with muscat too, and restaurant-goers anywhere in the country are likely to find on the menu a muscat wine or two from California or Oregon or Washington. The makers of these new muscats have chosen to imitate not the Italian but any of several German methods used for a number of hard-to-pronounce wines made with late-harvested grapes. (The wondrous and versatile riesling, the grape used in many of these wines, is finally beginning to get the respect it has long been denied in the mistaken equation of "sophisticated" with "dry.") Though almost never as low in alcohol or as effervescent as moscato d'Asti, these American muscat wines are lower in alcohol than most, and much less potent than Beaufort-de-Venise and its fortified cousins. The sweetness

comes from the grapes, which are picked when they are a good deal higher in sugar than other wine grapes. Although far from acidic, many of the wines have the snap of citrus—one of the chief characteristics of muscat grapes, along with hints of apricot, honey, and peach. Muscat wines are neither cloying nor overwhelmingly potent, as fortified wines, however luscious, can often be.

California muscats have had to overcome the Skid Row image they acquired during and after Prohibition, when cheap fortified muscatels became the poor man's brandy. On a recent harvesttime trip to northern California I spoke with a number of the winemakers who have rescued muscat's reputation. I also got my hands on true muscat grapes. After years of thinking that Italia offered the most flavor possible in one bite of grape, I found out what I'd been missing.

ROBERT Pecota was checking a tank of muscat "must" when I visited his small winery, north of the tourist-magnet town of St. Helena, in the Napa Valley, toward the end of this year's protracted and abundant grape harvest. Must is not simply grape juice, as it is often incorrectly said to be: it is the liquid that comes out of a grape crusher, thick with bits of stem, skin, seeds, and pulp. These contain many of the natural yeasts that speed fermentation. With such sweet grapes Pecota's goal is to slow fermentation, in order to develop the best flavor. He was checking to see that the cool temperature at which he was storing the must was sufficiently slowing the action of the yeast.

The grapes had come from the vineyard of Bruno and Tony Solari, Pecota's neighbors, who grow white muscat—the variety considered the finest and most fragrant in France and Italy. Tony Solari later told me that two years ago he and Bruno planted four more acres of white muscats, at the request of another vintner—a significant investment in the Napa Valley, where with four acres you can practically start a winery.

Pecota had kindly yielded to my telephone entreaty to ask his neighbors to bring over a few bunches of the grapes they were busy picking. Bees appeared over the colander as soon as Pecota took the grapes out of the refrigerator; so popular is muscat with insects (an alternate

derivation of the name is from *musca*, the Latin for "fly") that growers can lose five to 15 percent of a muscat planting to bees. Perhaps in self-defense, the grapes are thick-skinned ("tough as basketballs," Pecota said), which makes them difficult to press. The resistant skins also mean that muscats are less susceptible than other families to botrytis, which in its benevolent form is called "noble rot" for its ability to concentrate sugar without imparting off-flavors. In the cooler climates of Europe noble rot is necessary to concentrate the sugar in riesling grapes, for the sweetest German wines, and in sauterne grapes, for the legendary Château d'Yquem. The California sun and warm climate, along with the grapes' durability, allow muscats to develop the high level of sugar that vintners need.

I sought out Pecota because in a tasting of every California muscat I could find—along with a few Italian moscatos, for comparison—his seemed the truest reflection of the grape itself. Pecota makes many kinds of wine, but he has become particularly known for his desert muscat wine. The Italian moscato d'Asti was delightfully fresh and fizzy, the muscat flavor flirtatiously ducking in and out of view. (I was severely disappointed to learn that the Martini winery, which I passed many times during my visit, was sold out of moscato amabile.) And I was impressed with the syrupy power of the fortified Essensia wine from Quady, a winery in Madera that chiefly makes dessert wines from different varieties of muscat, including black muscat, named for its deep color, and orange muscat, a particularly fragrant and hard-to-grow variety named for its orange-blossom scent rather than for the taste of the fruit. But Quady emulates Beaufort-de-Venise, stopping the fermentation with distilled spirits and keeping the wine sweet, dense, and potent. With its afterkick of alcoholic heat, Essensia is better as a cordial to sip after dinner than as a wine to drink with dessert. The object of his muscat, Pecota told me, is to "carry through" the taste of the grape into the wine. This goal is different from the usual stamp a winemaker likes to put on a particular blend.

Other winemakers choose various ways to concentrate the sweetness and flavor, using the strategies evolved over

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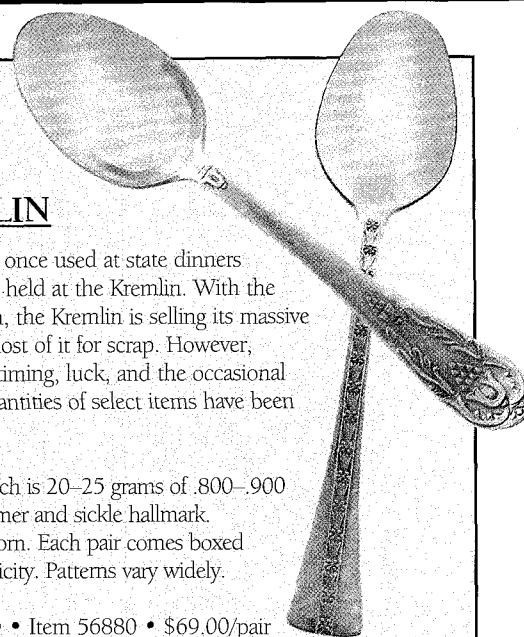
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centuries by European winemakers working in cool climates. Pecota told me that his muscat is made like the German Auslese, a wine whose name means “selected harvest,” because the grapes are picked when ripe and sweet. This year’s growing season was so long and dry that he was also able to make a wine corresponding to the German Trockenbeere-nauslese, a rare and expensive late-harvest wine whose name refers to grapes with an extremely high sugar content, usually the result of noble rot. This year’s weather enabled the Solaris to leave some muscats on the vine long enough for the grapes to develop the same high level of sugar from sunlight alone. Sensibly, Pecota doesn’t use the German name; instead he calls his wine Sweet Andrea, for one of his daughters.

A young winemaker in Spokane, Washington, also uses muscat to imitate an Alsatian wine. But Henning Knipprath, whose four-year-old winery I discovered on the Internet, takes “off-dry,” or lightly sweet, rieslings as his model for a dinner rather than a dessert wine (Knipprath muscat is distributed in western states, or you can order it by phone; the number is 509-624-9132). He recommends pairing his muscat with Cajun or Thai food—as does Pecota, who says, “You want to put out the fire before you go to beer.”

STILL more rare and expensive in Germany is Eiswein, named for grapes harvested so late that they have actually frozen on the vine. The labor involved sounds like something out of Hans Christian Andersen, but the concentration of sweetness and flavor is matchlessly intense: when the frozen grapes are crushed, they release only their syrup, which defrosts first. The winemaker discards the watery pulp that remains behind.

Randall Graham, an iconoclastic winemaker and a cut-up appreciated nearly as much for his pun-filled and erudite labels and newsletters as for his innovative and excellent wines, wondered why he needed to wait for a frost—something unlikely in any case in northern California; his winery takes its name, Bonny Doon, from the part of Santa Cruz where Graham first grew grapes. Graham, who is always planting underappreciated grapes and experimenting with offbeat

techniques, stuck some ripe muscats into the freezer, reasoning that the grapes wouldn’t know the difference. Cold storage would also allow him to make the wine after the main harvest, giving him something to do in the off-season.

This experiment worked—so well that Bonny Doon’s Vin de Glacière (French for “refrigerator”) has, with no advertising, become the most-ordered dessert wine in American restaurants. Graham blends white and orange muscats with malvasia bianca, another white grape with an ancient lineage, to obtain the sugar level and “almost digital muscat” flavor he wants, with hints of tangerine, peach, and pineapple. His “VdG,” as he refers to it, is a delicious wine, more concentrated than Pecota’s and full of the grape’s floral fragrance. At about \$15 for a 375-milliliter bottle, it’s an excellent introduction to muscat. Once you fall in love with the grape, you can try Pecota’s more accurate, if comparatively subdued, portrait of it (the same size bottle costs about \$9).

Graham, an incurable tinkerer, promises to make a moscato d’Asti. He has already tried several times. When I visited him, he literally held his head in his hands as he recounted his efforts over the years to conquer the problems of filtering, carbonating, and bottling it—an effort he likens to “making microchips or sending somebody to the moon.” (To be among the first to know when he succeeds, and to have a crack at tasting other experiments, you can sign up as a member of Graham’s organization D.E.W.N., for “Distinctive Esoteric Wine Network,” by calling 408-425-4518; for an annual fee D.E.W.N. will keep you in puns and new bottlings.)

In the meantime, those not planning a trip to the Martini winery in a car equipped with a cooler can try the latest release from Quady: Electra, its only nonfortified wine, which has only four percent alcohol and is named for the almost imperceptible fizz that remains after the wine is filtered and bottled. This is thinner than any of the other California muscats, without the tingle of a sparkling wine which makes you forget about how dense it is or isn’t. But Electra is lovely and refreshing, and a reminder that muscats are as sumptuous and delicious and purely grapey as wines can get. ☞

The Idea of the South

The American South may be joining the national parade, but writing about the South still tries to establish its distinctiveness

by Benjamin Schwarz

THE OXFORD BOOK OF THE AMERICAN SOUTH

edited by Edward L. Ayers and
Bradley C. Mittendorf.
Oxford University Press,
597 pages, \$30.00.

POWER IN THE BLOOD: Land, Memory and a Southern Family

by John Bentley Mays.
HarperCollins, 286 pages,
\$24.00.

DIXIE RISING

by Peter Applebome.
Harcourt Brace/Harvest Books,
393 pages, \$13.00 paper.

"TELL about the South. What's it like there. What do they do there. Why do they live there. Why do they live at all." So demands the Canadian Shreve McCannon of his roommate, the Mississippian Quentin Compson, in William Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom*. Readers' urge to know about the South and writers' compulsion to explain it have engendered a vast subfield of American letters over the past century and a half. Even leaving aside the southern novelists, poets, and storywriters, since the 1850s not five years have passed without a major work seeking to explore, explain, justify, or condemn a region that the historian David Potter called "a kind of sphinx on the American land."

Meditating on the region has also become a thriving academic industry, with specialized journals such as *Southern Cultures*, *Southern Studies*, *Southern*

Quarterly, and the venerable *Journal of Southern History*. Louisiana State University Press and the presses of the Universities of North Carolina, Virginia, and Georgia have developed long lists of titles in the fields of southern culture, literature and literary criticism, and history. (Trade publishers, especially Knopf,

have over the years also published a surprising number of studies of the South.) There are the *Encyclopedia of Southern Culture*, the *Encyclopedia of Religion in the South*, and the *Encyclopedia of Southern History*. There are two Institutes for Southern Studies, along with



the Center for the Study of Southern Culture and the Center for the Study of Southern History and Culture. The South also claims a group of outstanding literary and cultural quarterlies—the *Southern Review*, the *Sewanee Review*, the *Georgia Review*, and the *Virginia Quarterly Review*—that, although national in scope, pay particular attention to the region.

The three recent books under review, then, cover well-traveled ground and follow familiar forms. *The Oxford Book of the American South*, edited by the historian Edward Ayers (whose *Promise of the New South*, published in 1992, is one of the broadest and most original interpretations of southern history of the past twenty years) and the writer and political consultant Bradley Mittendorf, is an anthology of southern writing about the South from the eighteenth century to the present. Surprisingly, it is the most novel of the three books, even though more than twenty-five anthologies of southern literature have been published since the Civil War. Ayers and Mittendorf have taken a new approach, in that they haven't assembled a simple historical anthology.

Their selections don't, for instance, end in the 1950s, when the *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* decision set the stage for the eradication of the South's last peculiar institution, segregation, and when for the first time more of the population of the South—America's most rural region—lived in urban areas than in the country. Nor do the selections follow strict chronological order. Rather, by juxtaposing an excerpt from the diary of Sarah Morgan, born in 1842, with a short story by Barry Hannah, born in 1942, for example, Ayers and Mittendorf suggest that the South is a living tradition, "a society unfolding in time." Implicitly they, like many other southerners, see the South in much the same way that George Orwell saw England in 1940:

What can the England of 1940 have in common with the England of 1840? But then, what have you in common with the child of five whose photograph your mother keeps on the mantelpiece? Nothing, except that you happen to be the same person.

John Bentley Mays's *Power in the*

Blood traces his family's nearly 400-year history in the South and explores the lands in Virginia, South Carolina, and Louisiana where they dwelt. Having spent his adult life to that point in the North and in Canada, Mays, who is an art critic for the *Toronto Globe and Mail* and the author of a previous memoir (a No. 1 best seller in Canada), returned to the South to explore his personal, family, and regional history, intending "to discover the truth of the South—at least the truth of dwelling on the Southern land embodied in the ten generations of my ancestors and kin who have lived there." *Power in the Blood* is thus similar in form and intent to a host of classic works that marry memoir and family history in an effort to define the South through some specific southern experience or locale—including *God Shakes Creation* (1935), by David Cohn; *Lanterns on the Levee* (1941), by William Alexander Percy; *Red Hills and Cotton* (1942), by Ben Robertson; *The Making of a Southerner* (1946), by Katharine Du Pre Lumpkin; and *The Southern Heritage* (1958), by James McBride Dabbs. (In a quintessentially southern coincidence, Dabbs, unbeknownst to Mays, was a distant cousin and was born in Mayesville, South Carolina, the town founded by their ancestor in 1820.)

Since Mays's endeavor obliged him to travel throughout the South, his book at times also echoes another popular genre—the southern travelogue, which goes back to 1856, when Frederick Law Olmsted wrote *A Journey in the Seaboard Slave States* (and which also includes Clarence Cason's *90° in the Shade* and Jonathan Daniels's *A Southerner Discovers the South*). The travelogue is also the form that the former *New York Times* Atlanta bureau chief Peter Applebome adopts in *Dixie Rising*. Each of Applebome's chapters is devoted to a different southern locale paired with a theme—race relations in Selma, class conflict in the Carolina Piedmont, popular music in Nashville, urban prosperity in Charlotte, North Carolina. These often vivid pieces of reportage are made to serve his thesis that not only is the South becoming more like the rest of the country but the rest of the country more and more resembles the South.

With so many models, it's not surprising that *Power in the Blood* and *Dix-*

ie Rising labor under an enormous and potentially deadening weight. Mays and Applebome, and nearly all modern writers on the South, are consciously or unconsciously responding to their predecessors. They can't help seeing the region through other writers' eyes, which makes writing on the South tend toward the formulaic. When Mays, attempting to find a link to the past, tramps through neglected and overgrown cemeteries in search of lost ancestors, he is perhaps inspired by Willie Morris's similar search at the end of his memoir *North Toward Home* (1967). And Morris may have been inspired by the great southern poet Allen Tate's own graveyard visit, recounted in his "Ode to the Confederate Dead" (1926), by far the most famous southern poem of the century. These cemetery visits might be prompted by genuine sentiment, but they have also become obligatory. How could Mays, who has absorbed the notion that the southerner's way of thinking is "defined by memory and the land," write "a memoir of my family during the first four centuries of our tenure on Southern ground" and pass up the opportunity to search the Carolina softwood forest for the grave of his long-dead kinsman? Since it is almost impossible to see the region through fresh eyes, for a long time it has been difficult to find fresh perception in anything written about the South, or even in one's own impressions, for that matter.

The travelogue form that Applebome has chosen (which he describes as a "journalistic voyage across the region that captures in a big way a moment in the South's history and its place in the national imagination") is particularly difficult in this respect, since he visits many places—for example, Selma and Montgomery, Alabama, and the Mississippi Delta—precisely because they have already been mythologized. (Applebome did, however, manage to resist the obligatory visit with Eudora Welty on his swing through Jackson, Mississippi.) Not only is the writer prepared to see what his predecessors have described, but—a further complication—many of those interviewed have themselves absorbed stock answers and regional clichés. The North Carolina novelist Doris Betts, in an essay on southern literature, expressed amazement at V. S.

Naipaul's contention in *A Turn in the South* (1989) that southerners mentioned General Sherman to him almost daily, when she didn't hear of the general once a year. She ascribed Naipaul's experience to the stories southerners reflexively tell about themselves: "The temptation to go on quoting Allen Tate whether his words still apply or not is very great." "Naipaul seems," Betts continued, "to have accepted the South's idea of itself and scribbled it intact into his notebook after it dropped from the mouths of southerners." Similarly, Walker Percy suspected that much of the talk he heard about the South was only the repetition of unexamined clichés. He dismissed the literary characteristics of the South about which one hears so much. Percy wrote in 1977,

I've heard about that, the storytelling tradition, sense of identity, tragic dimension, community, history, and so forth. But I was never quite sure what it meant. In fact, I'm not sure that the opposite is not the case.

PERHAPS, then, Mays's effort "to discover the truth of the South" is doomed to failure. After surveying the myriad attempts to define southern distinctiveness (yet another genre of books, often consisting of collected essays and symposium papers), one finds that attempting to discover "the truth of the South" has become in large part a self-referential academic exercise, and it's tempting to concur with the argument presented by the intellectual historian Michael O'Brien in *The Idea of the American South* that the distinctive South is merely an intellectual construct.

The two twentieth-century classics of southern self-definition are *The Mind of the South*, by W. J. Cash, and *I'll Take My Stand*, a collection of essays by "Twelve Southerners," including Donald Davidson, John Crowe Ransom, Allen Tate, Robert Penn Warren, and Stark Young, collectively known as the Agrarians. These books are fifty-six and sixty-seven years old, respectively, and everything written on the South since their publication is something of a footnote to them. Like virtually every other writer on the South in the past half century, Ayers and Mittendorf, Mays, and Applebome are implicitly addressing two questions: Does Cash's state-

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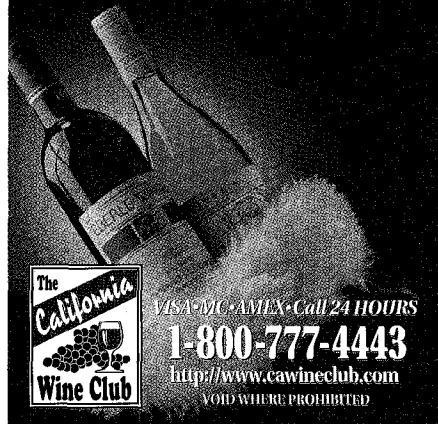
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ment that the South is "not quite a nation within a nation, but the next thing to it" remain true? And do the qualities of the southern character identified by the Agrarians—summed up nicely by the literary critic Fred Hobson as "a sense of time and place, a religious temper, a suspicion of material progress, a tradition of manners, a fury against abstraction"—also remain? Given all the changes that have engulfed the South in the past half century—the civil-rights revolution and what the historian C. Vann Woodward calls "the bulldozer revolution," which has destroyed the South's predominantly agrarian way of life—that these questions themselves remain is a testament to the persistence of the idea (if not the reality) of southern distinctiveness.

The first problem with the idea of a separate and distinct South is, simply, which South does one mean? Famously, the "mind" that Cash brilliantly dissected was not so much that of the South as a whole as it was that of the Carolina Piedmont. On the other hand, *The Oxford Book's* notion of the South is broad: it contains passages written by Frederick Douglass, who lived in the Maryland Tidewater; William Alexander Percy, who lived in the Mississippi Delta; and Fred Chappell, who was born and raised in Appalachia. The temporal, physical, cultural, and political distances separating these writers is enormous. Even within *I'll Take My Stand* it's unclear which antithetical version of the South the book is defending—the low-country, Anglican, planter-dominated, aristocratic vision that Ransom, Tate, Young, and John Gould Fletcher celebrated, or the upcountry, simple, democratic (for whites) South of the plain folks that Davidson, Andrew Lytle, and Frank Owsley embraced.

Moreover, one of the distinguishing features of southerners has supposedly been their sense of rootedness and community. But, as Cash argued, the South was a frontier society for longer than any other section of the country; and Mays writes that his family since 1609 "never tilled the same plot of Southern ground for more than two or three generations" and that "rootlessness [is] our most durable heritage." The intellectual Hugh Legaré, of Charleston, South Carolina, put it bluntly in 1838: "We have no local attachments. . . . If an estate, a

residence in town, a country seat, rises a little beyond what we are accustomed to think its value, it is sold without any hesitation."

Finally, and most important, even granting that "the South" was once a place apart from the rest of America, with a culture peculiarly its own, today's Dixie is by many measures fully "Americanized." After all, it has been nearly twenty-five years since the writer and veteran South-watcher John Egerton announced in *his* southern travelogue that "the South is just about over as a separate and distinct place." The region has proved no more immune than the rest of the country to the blandishments of the national commercial culture, and, as Applebome argues, what was once the rural impoverished South is now the country's "main engine of economic growth." How can we still talk of a South and a southern culture? And even if we can, could it be more than a relic?

BUT the South does remain a distinctive and recognizable unit, albeit in attenuated form, despite geographic and cultural differences within the region. As the North Carolina novelist Reynolds Price argued in 1976,

I can travel from Durham, North Carolina, to Jackson, Mississippi, which is a distance of 800 miles, and find that people are still speaking almost exactly the same dialect that I have grown up with and known all my life, whereas I can go from Durham, North Carolina, to Philadelphia, a distance of 400 miles, and find them speaking an utterly different dialect. . . . So it's not so much a matter of geographical distance as it is of a prevailing tradition over a large part of the country.

Even when southerners like the Mays family moved from place to place, those places were always populated by southerners. The Mississippi Delta, for example, is considered the most southern place on earth, although its history as a southern place is relatively recent. It was settled in the last generation before the Civil War, almost exclusively by blacks and whites from other places in the South—a group that the historian Joel Williamson describes as "the descendants of the primal stock that had first settled the South Atlantic seaboard." In

1955 the historian George W. Pierson claimed that there was "no New England region today" by showing that about 60 percent of Connecticut "Yankees" were in fact either foreign-born or born of foreign or mixed parentage and that fewer than 30 percent had New England forebears that went back more than two generations. In the South today, on the other hand, despite the influx of outsiders to Atlanta, Charlotte, and other cities, the vast majority of the population probably still descends from the original inhabitants. Because its share of immigrants in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries has been so small, the South has more residents with a long history in this country than any other region.

Southerners having been southerners for so long accounts in part for the clichéd perception of their special sense of memory, family, and history. Much of this, especially the vogue for genealogy that Mays notes, tends toward trite ancestor worship. But it can also be detected in the remarkably unselfconscious attitude that, in Faulkner's famous phrase, "the past isn't dead, it isn't even past." Thus, writing in 1942, Ben Robertson, discussing his family's long-held antipathy toward John Calhoun, who had been dead for ninety-two years, casually remarked, "We remembered when his grandmother was scalped at Longcane in 1760." That black and white southerners, as Reynolds Price writes, can "conduct mutually intelligible, agreeing dialogues with their resurrected great-grandparents and . . . for all that, do not see themselves as isolated islands of the past but as typical of the world around them" has given the best southern writers and thinkers an ease with tradition, permitting them to engage it rather than treat it with what T. S. Eliot called "a blind or timid adherence" that would lead inevitably to its ossification.

Throughout its history the South's death has been repeatedly predicted. John Randolph in the early 1800s foresaw its demise in the decline of "the old families of Virginia" and the rise of new "monied men," "citizens of no place or any place." Others supposed its death would come with the rise of the Cotton Kingdom's nouveau riche, with defeat in the Civil War, with the rise of the "New South," and then with the automobile. Finally desegregation and postwar pros-

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Those "West Bank" Settlements Are they really the "greatest obstacle to peace?"

In the context of the negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians that have now been going on for almost four years, it is often asserted that the Israeli towns and villages (usually and with some derogation referred to as "settlements") in Judea/Samaria (the "West Bank") are possibly the most serious obstacle to peace. That has been and is being repeated so often that many have come to accept it as truth.

What are the facts?

A recap of history. Some thumb-nail history may be in order. Large numbers of Jews have been living in these territories since biblical times. Most of the Arabs living there are in fact relative newcomers. "Palestine" is the entire area now covered by Israel including Judea/Samaria (the so-called "West Bank") and what is now the Kingdom of Jordan. It originally also included the Golan Heights, which later, in an agreement between England and France, were ceded to France, and to Syria as the successor in possession.

In 1922, contrary to the Mandate of the League of Nations, the British severed the entire area east of the Jordan and gave it to the Hashemite Arabs for their assistance in World War I. Thus, fully 75% of Palestine, all of which under the Mandate and under the terms of the Balfour Declaration was meant to be a home for the Jewish people, was lost for that purpose. Only the area west of the Jordan River was left for the Jewish homeland.

How the West Bank became "Arab country." In 1947, after decades of strife between Arabs and Jews, the British decided to relinquish the Mandate. The UN stepped in and proposed a partition plan under which the country (west of the River) was to be divided into respective Arab and Jewish areas. Jerusalem was to be internationalized. The Jews accepted the plan; the Arabs refused it out of hand. In 1948, on the twice truncated territory

allotted to them by the U.N., the Jews declared their independence and the state of Israel was born. On the same day, six Arab armies invaded the new-born state. In what can be described as an almost biblical miracle, the Jews defeated them. When an armistice was finally secured, however, TransJordan remained in possession of Judea/Samaria (the "West Bank") and the eastern part of Jerusalem; Egypt remained in possession of the Gaza Strip. TransJordan renamed itself Jordan.

The Six-Day War. Once in possession of the "West Bank" and eastern Jerusalem, the Jordanians promptly

"Why should the Arab countries and the 'West Bank' be the only places in the world where Jews are not allowed to live?"

ceded to expel all Jews and systematically to desecrate and to destroy most Jewish sacred places, cemeteries and houses of worship. No Jews, re-

gardless of citizenship were allowed into the "West Bank," eastern Jerusalem, the locale of the Western Wall, the holiest site in Judaism. In 1967, Egyptian president Abdel Nasser, joined by the same array of Arab armies that had unsuccessfully tried to destroy Israel at its birth in 1948, launched another war against Israel "to drive the Jews into the sea" and into oblivion, once and for all. But the Israelis utterly defeated the combined Arab might in the Six-Day War, one of the greatest military victories in history. When the dust of war settled, the Israelis had not only retained their national territory, but had *repossessed* the territories of Judea/Samaria (the "West Bank"), the eastern part of Jerusalem, the Gaza Strip, the Golan Heights and had totally occupied Egypt's vast Sinai Peninsula.

It is clear from this short history that Israel's claim to the "West Bank" is far stronger than that of the Arabs. It's only by constant repetition that the world has come to think of these territories as "occupied Arab land." About 200,000 Jews now live in these territories. And why shouldn't they? Why should the Arab countries and the "West Bank" be the only places in the whole world where Jews cannot live? How can 200,000 Jews living among one million Arabs be "an obstacle to peace?" Over one million Arabs live in Israel. They are citizens, they have every civil right, and of course have nothing to fear from their Jewish fellow citizens. Certainly, nobody considers them an obstacle to peace.

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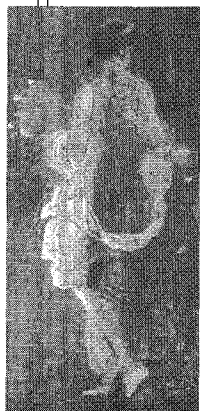
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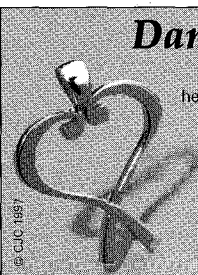
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perity were going to kill it. But as *The Oxford Book* shows, by juxtaposing past and present writing to create a dialogue that extends over generations, the South's best minds and most-astute observers have both seen and created the South as a thing akin to England's culture in Orwell's description: "an everlasting animal stretching into the future and the past, and, like all living things, having the power to change out of recognition and yet remain the same."

ATTEMPTS to define the South and relate the southern experience still too often commit the error that Tate made in his 1935 essay "The Profession of Letters in the South." Describing the distinguishing features of southern life and culture, Tate sought to explain how these developed even though "the South was settled by the same European strains as originally settled in the North." In fact the populations of the North and the South were considerably different, in that blacks were a majority in Colonial South Carolina and made up about 43 percent of the population of Jefferson's Virginia. Applebome astutely observes that "the South" celebrated today by active "southern partisans" is really only the South of white southerners. Advancing such a version of the region is a serious error, not because it violates contemporary codes of racial sensitivity but because it presents an incorrect view of the South and its people.

In a 1993 survey at the University of Virginia, black southerners were even more likely than white southerners to take pride in their southern background. This shouldn't be surprising; Martin Luther King Jr., after all, always spoke of himself as a "southerner" and wrote of "our beloved Southland." Perceptive students of the region have long observed that if an intense attachment to the land, a sense of place and family, an insistence on hospitality and manners, a strong folk culture, and an adherence to evangelical Christianity characterize the southerner, then "there is no one more quintessentially Southern," as C. Vann Woodward maintained, "than the Southern Negro."

Without doubt the fundamental element of the temperament and culture of the South is that blacks and whites have lived there together for so long. Of all

Cash's insights into the southern ethos, none was so penetrating—or, unfortunately, so underdeveloped—as his argument, scandalous for the time it was written, that blacks had a profound influence on whites in the South.

In this society in which . . . nearly the whole body of whites, young and old, had constantly before their eyes the example, of the Negro, the relationship between the two groups was, by the second generation at least, nothing less than organic. Negro entered into white man as profoundly as white man entered into Negro—subtly influencing every gesture, every word, every emotion and idea, every attitude.

Nearly every distinctive aspect of southern life—from speech and food to music and the storytelling tradition to the style and spirit of southern Protestantism to the very word "Dixie"—developed from the interchange of the two races. Even southerners' courtesy and manners (subtly explored in the stories of Peter Taylor and the novels of Reynolds Price, Hamilton Basso, and Eudora Welty), qualities that, Ayers has written, are "perhaps the most tangible evidence of a Southern upbringing," are, scholars agree, the product of the fusion of black and white attitudes.

Applebome is especially sensitive to the biracial nature of southern culture and manners and believes, or wishes to believe, that "the routine courtesies and kindness and daily common ground of Southern life" afford "the nation's best blueprint for racial peace." This argument has a distinguished history. The South Carolina writer and minister James McBride Dabbs, for example, was devoted both to the traditional, agrarian southern way of life and to the notion that southern blacks and whites by "the grace of God . . . have been made one people." Like Dabbs's, King's vision of a biracial redemptive South as the scene for national salvation—in which the descendants of slaves and of slaveholders would sit together on the red hills of Georgia as southern brothers—was based on a commitment to evangelical Christianity, an admiration of the South's manners and spiritual values, and an appreciation of the informal relationships between black and white southerners.

THE idea that those distinctive qualities of the South that are admirable have something to offer the nation as a whole has been powerful, as Applebome points out, although it has yet to be taken seriously by what is often called the cultural elite. On those rare occasions when intellectuals in, say, New York or Los Angeles discuss the South, the talk too often gets ugly. Someone inevitably mumbles something about *Deliverance*, and another jokes about trailer parks, while the rest swap adjectives, one of which is always "intolerant." Among those who would never issue a racial slur or denigrate a foreign people in polite conversation, flaunting a prejudice against the South is not merely acceptable—it's helpful in establishing "progressive" bona fides. But many of the South's distinctive qualities that are reflexively condemned—its religiosity among them—are hardly what those who belittle them suppose them to be.

Traveling throughout the region in 1910, the English writer William Archer observed that "the South is by a long way the most simply and sincerely religious country that I ever was in. . . it is a country in which . . . God is very real and personal." Eighty-seven years later southerners—black and white—remain the most religious regional group in the country. Evangelicalism is, as Ayers has maintained, "the great continuity and commonality in Southern culture." Traditionally, this southern Protestantism has meant something quite different from the stereotype of emotion, ignorance, and superstition promulgated by H. L. Mencken.

In its renunciation of all worldly things, in what the writer Lillian Smith called its "sheet-lightning glimpses into the dark places of the human mind," in its demand that every believer work for his or her own salvation, and in its stark and tragic view of life, evangelicalism was a hard religion for a hard people. Historically, evangelicalism in the South found most of its adherents among the lower half of the social scale. Slaves and sharecroppers, dirt farmers and mill hands, embraced it, because it allowed them to shape their culture and their spiritual values, rather than being forced to depend on the mediations of political and religious elites. As the southern sociologist John Shelton Reed argued in 1981,

it engendered a "prickly independence of men whose God has told them they are as good as anybody else, and better than the unsaved."

Evangelicalism's strong sense of the imperfections of the world and its pessimistic view of the nature of man, together with its ultimately redemptive and joyous creed, also helped to produce among the writers of the Southern Renaissance a literary and philosophical viewpoint peculiar in mid-twentieth-century liberal America. In "The Catholic Novelist in the Protestant South," Flannery O'Connor explained the essential role played by the fervent religion often glibly disparaged in the southern literature so widely admired.

It was about 1919 that Mencken called the South the Bible Belt and the Sahara of the Bozarts. Today Southern literature is known around the world, and the South is still the Bible Belt. . . . To be great storytellers, we need something to measure ourselves against. . . . guides have to exist in a concrete form, known and held sacred by the whole community. They have to exist in the form of stories which affect our image and our judgment of ourselves. Abstractions, formulas, laws will not serve here. We have to have stories in our background. . . . The Hebrew genius for making the absolute concrete. . . . is one of the reasons why the South is a storytelling section. Our response to life is different if we have been taught only a definition of faith than if we have trembled with Abraham as he held the knife over Isaac.

Although its emphasis is clearly not on political thought, *The Oxford Book's* selections from *I'll Take My Stand*, *Red Hills and Cotton*, and Jefferson's *Notes on the State of Virginia* let readers limn what the historian Eugene Genovese calls the "southern tradition," a political and philosophical tradition that Mays succinctly, if inadvertently, sums up at the end of *Power in the Blood* as "noble, failed attempts to raise on Southern ground a culture rooted in the natural order of our seasons, to build a civilization free of cruel utopianism and metropolitan alienation, sustained by loyalties to place." The significance of that tradition is its failure, for, as John Crowe Ransom declared, the Agrarians supported "a Southern way of life against

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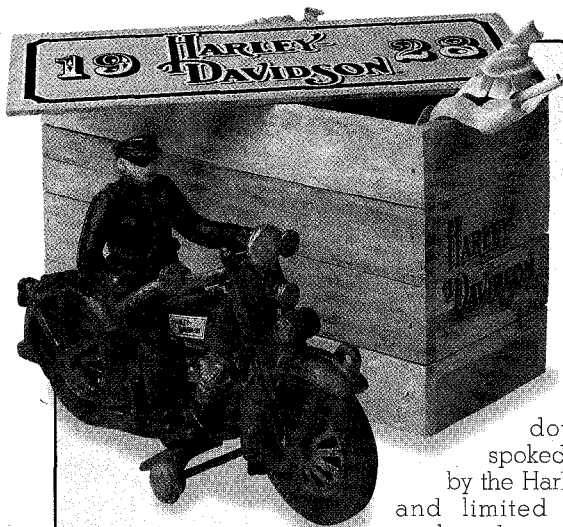
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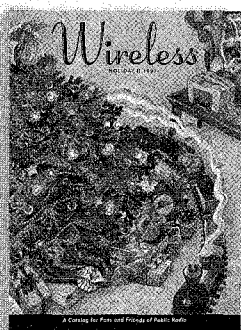
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what might be called the American or prevailing way."

From Thomas Jefferson and his contemporary the political thinker John Taylor of Caroline through the Agrarians to Dabbs (and to a figure many of the Agrarians saw as their successor, the northern social critic Christopher Lasch), the southern tradition reconciled the populist and aristocratic strains that the region has always embodied. The two strains, as Robertson pointed out, "have had this in common throughout the South since the beginning: both have been . . . fearful of the sort of state the Northern capitalists intended to set up in the United States." The southern tradition is thus—as Robertson described his grandmother, who was an adherent of it—"conservative in a Southern way and radical." Its defense of rural life was more generally a defense against the development of a market-based society—against what the Agrarians called "corporate capitalism," the discipline of factories and mass production and the creation of a wage-dependent working class. It defended the South, as Stark Young wrote, as a "civilization whose ideal is social existence rather than production, competition and barter," and which resisted the nationwide creation of an atomistic, individualistic, and impersonal society. Its efforts, of course, were futile. It has nevertheless, as Genovese asserts, "constituted America's most impressive native-born critique of our national development, of liberalism, and of the more disquieting features of the modern world."

THE noble aspects of the South's biracial, religious, and political traditions make it tempting to embrace the frequently held notion that the region, as the southern religion historian Samuel Hill writes, is "in a position to reclaim and give guidance to the entire nation." But the South has always had a perverse tendency to turn its back on its best attributes and to fail to apply the lessons that its history teaches. In 1953, at the height of the Cold War, C. Vann Woodward offered the thesis that the South, with its heritage of failure and tragedy, might temper America's sense of self-righteous invincibility and teach the country to be modest, particularly in its foreign relations. Fifteen years later the

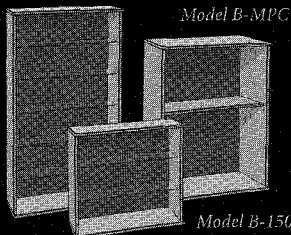


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U.S. war in Vietnam seemed a propitious occasion, as Woodward acknowledged in retrospect, for Americans to "profit from the un-American heritage of the South." Ironically, however, southerners, rather than counseling restraint, were at that time sitting as President, Secretary of State, and commander of U.S. forces in Vietnam.

Mays and Applebome each offer a depressingly large amount of evidence of the South's tendency to fail to live up to its possibilities. Mays rather elliptically bemoans the "devastations brought down on the South by the unworthiness of my [southern] countrymen," citing "the spiritual ruin inflicted by our adoption of America's materialism and will to power, the emptying of the countryside people into the huge cities of the New South, the dissolution, in my post-bellum family, of old loyalties to the Southern earth." And Applebome's *Dixie Rising* is unintentionally a chronicle of how the South in its encounter with the rest of America has retained its sins but lost many of its virtues.

A traditional feature of southern life, for instance, is that blacks and whites come in daily contact with one another. Despite the enormities of slavery and the Jim Crow system, continual interaction engendered shared experience and what King called "an intimacy of life." King predicted that the nature of life in the South would "make it one of the finest sections of our country once we solve this problem of segregation." Today, however, the biracial South of the past is being replaced—as Applebome repeatedly demonstrates—not by the integrated South of King's vision but by a new, suburbanized South in which, conforming to the national pattern, the cities are left to poor blacks, reducing them in the eyes of whites to an abstract problem and further alienating and estranging the races. This new, informal segregation, regrettable everywhere, is especially tragic in the South, since by giving up their close co-existence, white and black southerners will inevitably lose a vital part of what makes them who they are.

Southern religion is also changing. Although the Bible admonishes, "Be not conformed to this world," southern Protestantism is increasingly finding that its self-abasing inwardness conflicts with its drive to make its mark in today's cul-

ture. Although its adherents are outwardly committed to the religion of their parents, that religion, with the temporal ambitions of its televangelists, the sprouting of its massive and impersonal suburban churches, and its Christian resorts, is bending under the weight of its members' increasing prosperity. Lured by the gratifications of a consumerist society, many of today's southern Protestants are seeking, and finding, a religious expression that is undemanding and offers immediate psychological rewards in keeping with their new ethos. They want to consider themselves evangelical Christians even as they join the rest of America in its pursuit of the good life.

As for the South's political tradition, the region has recently spawned a host of political leaders, most prominent among them Newt Gingrich and Trent Lott, who are self-described conservatives. Those figures, however, along with the leaders of the South's low-wage, socially indifferent industrial sector, represent a repudiation of the region's distinctive conservatism and the triumph of the laissez-faire, corporate-friendly "New South" vision, the *bête noire* of both traditional southern conservatives and radical populists. Whereas today's "conservatives" simultaneously embrace the free market and family and community values, the Agrarians and other traditional southern conservatives—as well as Jeffersonians and the Populists—dreaded capitalism precisely because it undermined those values. Capitalism, they argued, reduced individuals to abstractions, anonymous buyers and sellers, whose claims on each other were determined solely by the market, and thereby corroded the human and Christian ties that, they believed, bound men and women into communities. The South today is, as Applebome asserts, politically more powerful than it has been since before the Civil War. But the influence it has gained by conforming to the narrow range of the national political and economic culture has cost it its distinctive and potentially valuable political voice.

The South's tragedy, however, is not its repeated betrayal of its best self but that its best cannot be separated from its worst. It would be comforting to accept Mays's simplistic division of the region into a dark, murderous, and racist up-



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• CATALOGUES •

country on the one hand, and a coastal plain that serves as a repository for southern virtues on the other, but in fact the legacy of the region is far more complex and ambiguous. In case after case throughout southern history the admirable and the loathsome have been rooted in the same soil. Antebellum southern intellectuals delivered perhaps the most sophisticated critique of America's commercial values and social relations ever produced in this country, but they did so in the course of defending slavery. For more than three centuries blacks and whites in the South were bound together in an organic community, but only because of brutal economic exploitation that guaranteed their estrangement. Historically, democracy for white southerners went hand in hand with racial discrimination against black southerners. Such opponents of segregation as Robert Penn Warren, Faulkner, and Dabbs sought to preserve the admirable qualities of traditional southern life against the spread of market values, even though the spread of market values would have destroyed the Jim Crow system. The South is famous for its courtesy, but the highly refined concept of honor that largely produced its manners has also helped to make the region the most violent in the country—as the old saying goes, a southerner is gracious and friendly until he is mad enough to kill you. For 400 years the South has been riddled with such contradictions and paradoxes, and this may ultimately account for the seemingly endless attempts to explain it.

As it submits increasingly to what Woodward deplorably termed “the national steamroller,” the region's many admirable and its few remaining reprehensible qualities will be ironed out. With the apparent global triumph of corporate capitalism and its concomitant, an atomistic, radical individualism, the world and the country, even the South itself, are hardly likely to heed the noble and anachronistic aspects of the southern political and religious traditions. Although contradiction and paradox are by no means peculiar to the southern experience, the South has exhibited them in unusually bold relief. Its own tragic experience of the ambivalence at the heart of history and in the heart of man may be the only valuable heritage that the South can bequeath. ☼

Toward a New Public School

by Theodore R.Sizer

REINVENTING PUBLIC EDUCATION: How Contracting Can Transform America's Schools

by Paul T. Hill, Lawrence C. Pierce,
and James W. Guthrie.
The University of Chicago Press,
267 pages, \$16.95.

HERE, from three experts on education policy, is an idea for “reinventing” American public education. The idea is simple, neat, and familiar: have school boards cease to operate schools directly and instead contract with private (not-for-profit or for-profit) organizations to provide day-to-day schooling. That is, arrange for schools to work the way the selection of textbooks now does. School boards do not design and print texts; they decide what they want and then choose from the offerings of vendors. If after a year or two a text is found wanting, another is readily at hand to replace it. The wishes of school boards profoundly affect what publishers print. There is synergy here, hardly perfect but demonstrably better than any available alternative. This arrangement allows for choices among competing texts, is flexible, and leaves room for experimentation. It keeps the boards away from the nuts and bolts of publishing, allowing them to concentrate on other matters. It permits decisive, orderly changes in educational approach.

If such a policy were extended from textbooks to the design and operation of whole schools, boards of education would start by setting the scope and standards of the educational offerings they wanted. They would then solicit bids from providers, select one or several, and write contracts with each. From that point forward the detailed operation of a school, or a cluster of schools, would be in the hands of the contractor, though shaped by the contract. The

school boards could focus their attention on overall policy rather than on micro-managing individual schools. Contracts would come up for renewal periodically, giving the school board the option of staying the course, modestly or substantially changing it, or starting anew.

All this is familiar American practice. Many public or quasi-public entities contract for much of their work: school districts hire Marriott to operate their cafeterias; the U.S. Postal Service asks Delta and American to haul mail; city and town governments contract with builders to construct public buildings. There have been several, albeit halting, attempts to run public schools under contract, but these have been essentially limited management contracts, not freshly focused and bold reconceptions of what a good modern education should entail.

So, then, what makes this orderly, familiar, and thus presumably uncontroversial proposal a “reinvention”? Some will predict the apocalypse: privatization! They forget that publicly directed bodies unilaterally write the specifications for contract schools. More critics will predict “union-bashing.” They overlook the fact that progressive district leaders and unions across the country have already joined in launching new schools that are largely free from traditional regulation. Yet other critics will see contract schools as devices for segregation. They forget that (alas) many metropolitan regions are already profoundly segregated. Contract schools will not necessarily affect this one way or the other.

The book's title reminds us how profoundly we are stuck even in the way we think about schooling and learning. We assume that formal education will be delivered by professionals working inside rectangular classrooms within buildings that together with similar buildings elsewhere in the community make up a system. We assume that such systems, whatever their size, are an important expression of democracy, reflecting the wishes of their communities.

However, even as these systems have had to deal with growing numbers of ever more diverse children, they have clung to their routines, inevitably making public education, the authors say, “more rule-bound, rights-driven, and divided into specialties.” And, they continue, by centralizing decision-making in district

offices, courts, and state departments of education, "we have weakened schools as organizations." Many districts are now enormous enterprises, enormously complex and thus rigid. There are currently more children enrolled in the New York City public schools than there are citizens in Rhode Island.

And we keep thinking that "public education" is necessarily, inevitably, the same thing as those enterprises. What they consider to be education becomes what is offered in the classroom; people's hopes for and commitment to their children are properly synthesized and then expressed through bureaucracies and their political chiefs. We find ourselves trapped by a conception of schools that is appealingly noble but demonstrably impractical. We are dominated by what the authors call an "organizational frame of mind"—one that makes any examination of the most efficacious ways and means of educating our children apostate, unthinkable. "Educators' habits of operating as bureaucrats under regulation are deeply ingrained," the authors say. Hence this book's argument for reinvention.

HILL, Pierce, and Guthrie exhaustively describe how a contract system might work. They deal with the practicalities, knowing full well that to avoid them would allow the book to be dismissed as pie in the sky. A long appendix deals with a wide range of questions about precisely how a contract would function. The authors are good and patient explainers. They are persuasive: all this can be made to work. This book isn't Rousseau's *Emile*. It is a highly sophisticated field manual, along with an argument for the importance of its message. It is likely, therefore, to be effective. Reinvention will come, sooner or later.

The authors write,

Americans quite properly seek public schools that both respect the rights and values of a diverse population and make the most of the talents and initiative of individual students and teachers. Unfortunately, the rules, regulations, and bureaucratic machinery created to attend to the first of these goals threaten to overwhelm the second. The result: a system that works for very few.

Few believe any more that the failure is the result merely of bad leadership.

What is striking about the past two decades, particularly in urban American school districts, is both the high quality and determination of many leaders in education and the strict limitations that are placed on their ability to improve the performance of their students. If it isn't the people who are the problem, it must be the system. A growing number of influential Americans understand that.

Contract schools, as the authors describe them, give substantial power to the people holding the contracts. Once they have their marching orders, they are to be left largely alone. There are today dozens of such nominally "public" schools, places that are deliberately self-governing, close to and in league with the parents of their students—but whose "contracts" have come about because of inattention or desperation (many of these schools serve the poor) or through deliberate benign conspiracy. They are "upstart" schools, and the best of them work profoundly well, as the school reformer Deborah Meier has movingly described in *The Power of Their Ideas* (1995). Some state governments have authorized the creation of charter schools (whose charters are, for all intents and purposes, contracts). Some cities have done likewise: Boston's pilot schools, for example, are creatures of that city's collective-bargaining agreement with its teachers. Usually such innovations are bitterly fought by those accustomed to controlling the established system: they are properly seen as true reinventions. As these schools grow in number and build up strong track records, the down-to-earth contracting ideas of Hill, Pierce, and Guthrie will seem ever more mainstream.

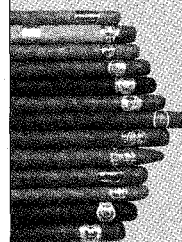
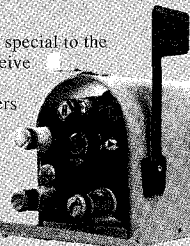
More difficult for the existing system to absorb is the notion that, as the authors put it, "schools will have to differ in their goals and approaches." That is, there cannot be One Best System (to quote from the title of David Tyack's careful history of Americans' pursuit of universal education). Government must learn to trust the people, and in education the people deserving disproportionate authority are the parents of the children in question. If there were a variety of contract schools in a district (an approach the authors applaud) and parents could choose among them, then children in that district would have the opportunity to attend different sorts of good schools. A market would

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(Required by 39 USC 3685). 1. Publication Title: The Atlantic Monthly. 2. Publication No.: ISSN 02769077. 3. Filing Date: October 1, 1997. 4. Issue Frequency: Monthly. 5. No. of issues published annually: Twelve. 6. Annual subscription price: \$17.94. 7. Complete mailing address of known office of publication: 77 N. Washington Street, Boston (Suffolk County) MA 02114-1908. 8. Complete mailing address of the headquarters or general business offices of the publisher: 77 N. Washington Street, Boston (Suffolk County) MA 02114-1908. 9. Full names and complete mailing addresses of publisher, editor, and managing editor: Publisher: R. Scott Ford, 1290 Avenue of the Americas, Suite 600, New York, NY 10104. Editor: William Whitworth, 77 N. Washington Street, Boston (Suffolk County) MA 02114. Managing Editor: Cullen Murphy, 77 N. Washington Street, Boston (Suffolk County) MA 02114. 10. Owner: The Atlantic Monthly Co., 77 N. Washington Street, Boston (Suffolk County) MA 02114. Mortimer B. Zuckerman, 77 N. Washington Street, Boston (Suffolk County) MA 02114. 11. Known bondholders, mortgages, and other security holders owning or holding 1 percent or more of total amount of bonds, mortgages or other securities: None. 13. Publication Title: The Atlantic Monthly. 14. Issue date for circulation data below: October 1997. 15. Extent and nature of circulation: a. Total No. copies (Net press run): Average No. copies each issue during preceding 12 months: 542,625. Actual No. copies of single issue published nearest to filing date: 534,436. b. Paid and/or requested circulation: 1. Sales through dealers and carriers, street vendors, and counter sales (not mailed): Average No. copies each issue during preceding 12 months: 37,071. Actual No. copies of single issue published nearest to filing date: 40,000. 2. Paid or requested mail subscriptions (include advertisers' proof copies/exchange copies): Average No. copies each issue during preceding 12 months: 423,182. Actual No. copies of single issue published nearest to filing date: 425,016. c. Total paid and/or requested circulation: Average No. copies each issue during preceding 12 months: 460,253. Actual No. copies of single issue published nearest to filing date: 465,016. d. Free distribution by mail (samples, complimentary, and other free): Average No. copies each issue during preceding 12 months: 11,688. Actual No. copies of single issue published nearest to filing date: 11,247. e. Free distribution outside the mail (carriers or other means): Average No. copies each issue during preceding 12 months: 3,516. Actual No. copies of single issue published nearest to filing date: 3,270. f. Total free distribution: Average No. copies each issue during preceding 12 months: 15,204. Actual No. copies of single issue published nearest to filing date: 14,517. g. Total distribution: Average No. copies each issue during preceding 12 months: 475,457. Actual No. copies of single issue published nearest to filing date: 479,533. h. Copies not distributed: 1. Office use, left-overs, spoiled: Average No. copies each issue during preceding 12 months: 232. Actual No. copies of single issue published nearest to filing date: 192. 2. Returns from news agents: Average No. copies each issue during preceding 12 months: 66,936. Actual No. copies of single issue published nearest to filing date: 54,711. i. Total: Average No. copies each issue during preceding 12 months: 542,625. Actual No. copies of single issue published nearest to filing date: 534,436. Percent paid and/or requested circulation: Average No. copies each issue during preceding 12 months: 96.8%. Actual No. copies of single issue published nearest to filing date: 97.0%. 17. I certify that all information furnished on this form is true and complete.

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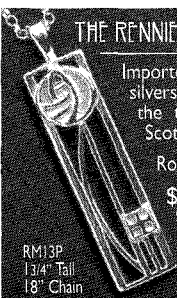
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operate, with those schools that failed to win favor going out of business and being replaced by schools more attractive to consumers. This would be true reinvention, with emphasis on the "re-": American public education started some 150 years ago with small, locally controlled, and responsive schools (for better or worse)—classic "upstart" schools.

Of course, we live in times quite different from those of Horace Mann. The nationalizing agencies of informal education, which teach the young about life, are now numerous and extraordinarily powerful—and none more so than the mass media. The homogenizing force of these agencies would astonish the founders of the American public school. The argument for collective institutions

close to the people they serve has, therefore, new legitimacy, even if the leaders of school systems can't acknowledge it. The slow breakup of huge school systems is under way, peppered by contrary-seeming policy initiatives (such as detailed state-dictated curricula) derived from the days of the "administrative progressives."

Contract schools will come, sooner rather than later. The quiet, thorough, and constructive ideas presented in *Reinventing Public Education* will serve to remind us of the need to think anew about the purposes and methods of a truly useful public education, and also to provide us with a careful blueprint once we are ready to take the leap toward a new sort of public school. ☼

BRIEF REVIEWS



The Djinn in the Nightingale's Eye

by A. S. Byatt.

Random House, 288 pages, \$19.00.

This small book contains five so-called fairy tales. What is a fairy tale, exactly? In Ms. Byatt's hands it is a vehicle for the exposition of ideas on art, society, ethics, and freedom, and for the questioning of those ideas, with all these matters expressed in exquisitely light, witty, oblique terms. Princesses wander through magic woodlands, a pig survives dragons, and the djinn—once out of his bottle—is a djinn like no other. Ms. Byatt mentions "flashes and floods of paradisaic light in odd places and at odd times." Her tales cast just such light.

Fantastic Tales

edited by Italo Calvino.

Pantheon, 416 pages, \$27.50.

Mr. Calvino's introduction to this anthology is an acutely thoughtful discussion of what makes a fantastic tale, how

the genre developed during the nineteenth century, and the reasons for its abiding popularity. Some of the tales are well known, some not. Most are by European authors. One Russian specimen hardly qualifies as fantasy—but the editor could not resist it. One can see why. It is a wicked charmer.

Pickett's Charge in History and Memory

by Carol Reardon.

University of North Carolina,

296 pages, \$29.95.

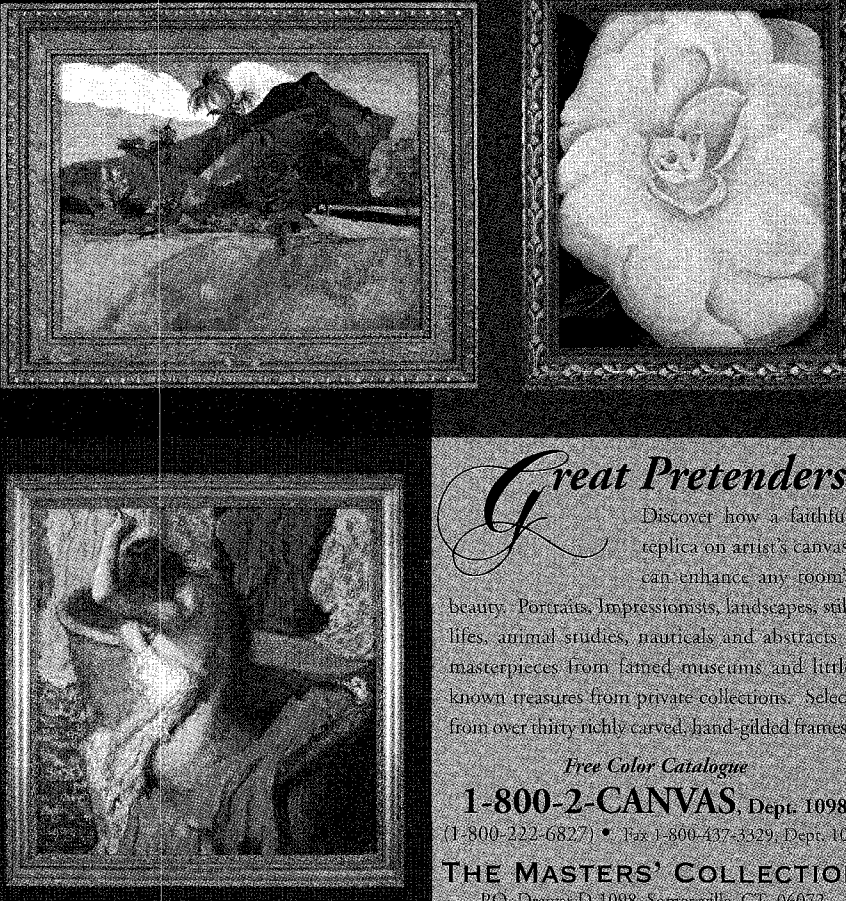
Whoever defined history as an agreed-upon lie was not acquainted with the aftermath of Pickett's charge at Gettysburg. Journalists could see no more than a fraction of the action, if they saw any at all. Participants saw even less. It took five days for definite word of Lee's defeat to reach Richmond (in bootlegged northern papers) and longer for it to travel south. Newspapers were filled with melodramatic babble, and battle survivors, when consulted, contradicted one

another. Even the duration of the initial Confederate artillery attack remains in dispute; estimates range from minutes to hours. Such discrepancies are not, however, the real focus of Ms. Reardon's investigation. She examines the mixture of local patriotism (Virginia), local resentment (North Carolina et al.), Reconstruction politics, campaigns for reconciliation, and moonlight-and-magnolia fiction that eventually made Gettysburg the best-known battle of the Civil War and Pickett's Charge the heroic high point of the Rebel cause. Ms. Reardon's text is well supplied with anecdote and quotation and covers events as recent as a 1922 Marine Corps re-enactment of the action to see "What would have happened at Gettysburg if the armies of Meade and Lee had met with modern weapons and equipment?" The conclusion: Lee would have lost, but given air observation, he probably would not have launched an attack against "the entire Army of the Potomac." Quite apart from its notable historical interest, Ms. Reardon's work is a splendidly lively study of the manipulation, not necessarily deliberate or malign, of public opinion.

Making Faces: Using Forensic and Archaeological Evidence

by John Prag and Richard Neave.
Texas A&M, 256 pages,
\$39.95.

Using what they describe as thoroughly scientific methods, the authors have reconstructed the faces of unidentifiable skulls for the British police, with such success that they have been recruited to make a number of such reconstructions for archaeologists. These jobs require historical research, caution in handling decrepit bones, and some guesswork in filling gaps. The authors' encounters with Philip of Macedon and King Midas lead them into antique medicine and myth. Their work with the badly damaged skulls behind the gold masks at Mycenae produces faces that would look well at the local chamber of commerce. Bog bodies present a different set of problems, handsomely solved. The account given by Mr. Prag and Mr. Neave will please anyone interested in their technique or their subjects. Readers averse to old bones will not benefit from it.



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Egon Schiele

by Magdalena Dabrowski
and Rudolf Leopold.
Yale, 363 pages, \$60.00.

The art collection of Rudolf Leopold, displayed in this volume, well represents the brilliant draftsmanship, idiosyncratic color, and intense, often neurotic power of Schiele's work. Ms. Dabrowski's introduction tells enough about the painter's family background to account for his sexually morbid self-portraits and enough about turn-of-the-century Viennese society to account for his *épater le bourgeois* female nudes. Schiele was under thirty when he died in the flu epidemic of 1918. One can only wonder where his art would have gone in the 1920s, because in some respects he was already ahead of them.

Into Africa

by Marq de Villiers and Sheila Hirtle.
Firefly Books, 400 pages,
\$29.95.

"Africa," according to the authors, "is going in all directions at once" and always has been. Their report combines a firsthand account of the inconsistencies, accomplishments, and plain horrors currently reported by the media with Africa's long history of rising and falling empires, wise kings and bloody tyrants, shifting territories and migrant populations. It is a history as disorderly as that of Europe, and the authors would have the outside world understand that Africa is a conservative continent that maintains a constant state of flux. They also assert that "hardly anyone in Africa any longer blames Africa's problems on colonialism." Altogether, this book presents unfamiliar facts reinforcing an unusual point of view.

Panther in the Basement

by Amos Oz,
translated by Nicholas de Lange.
Harcourt Brace, 160 pages,
\$21.00.

Mr. Oz's reminiscent novel describes the doings of a twelve-year-old boy in the last year of British control in Israel. Young Proffy has organized a pro-Israel underground cell that proposes to blow up Buckingham Palace or perhaps 10 Downing Street. These heroic dreams are no danger to anybody, but Proffy's friendship with a kindly British soldier causes his two fellow panthers to accuse him of

treason. Around this juvenile imbroglio Mr. Oz creates a vivid picture of life in Jerusalem, with sharply drawn characters doing what Proffy reports without necessarily understanding it. The novel offers an unexpectedly charming and humane memory of a tense, tough time.

Pfitz

by Andrew Crumey.
Picador, 164 pages, \$20.00.

Mr. Crumey has written a fantastic novel about a fantasy. An eighteenth-century prince, presumably in Central Europe, designs a series of imaginary cities, the last of which he proposes to create in actuality, devoting his entire country to the project. His people are real, as is the work they do on the dream city. Eventually real and unreal merge, interact, and form a tale that is part quirky amusement and part sly satire on governments, bureaucracies, and the reader's expectations.

The Gashlycrumb Tinies

by Edward Gorey.

The Curious Sofa

by Ogdred Weary.

Harcourt Brace,
each 64 pages and \$9.00.

Both these early works of Mr. Gorey's are being reissued for the pleasure of lovers of fine drawing, deadpan horror, and discreet pornography.

—Phoebe-Lou Adams

Recent books by Atlantic contributors:

Dog's Best Friend: Annals of the Dog-Human Relationship by Mark Derr. Holt, 380 pages, \$25.00. Portions of this book first appeared, in different form, in *The Atlantic Monthly*.

Unauthorized Portraits by Edward Sorel. Knopf, 192 pages, \$40.00. A number of the satirical drawings in this book first appeared as illustrations in *The Atlantic*, many of them for the regular feature First Encounters, written by Sorel's wife, Nancy Caldwell Sorel.

Speaking Freely: A Guided Tour of American English From Plymouth Rock to Silicon Valley by Stuart Berg Flexner and Anne H. Soukhanov. Oxford University Press, 472 pages, \$39.95. Anne Soukhanov is the author of the regular *Atlantic* feature Word Watch.



THE PUZZLER

by Emily Cox and Henry Rathvon

Cryptacrostic

Answers to this month's puzzle should be entered in the grid letter by letter at the coordinates given after each clue. When all the letters have been entered, most of them will form a quotation reading from left to right and top to bottom. The remaining letters interrupt the sequence of the quotation and spell out its source; each of these letters is found in *three* different clue answers. Letters that are found in *two* different clue answers begin the words of the quotation. Solvers are advised to shade the squares containing the quotation's source, just to complete the picture. Answers include one proper noun.

The solution to last month's Puzzler appears on page 129.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
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Clues

1. Take too many drugs and initially hallucinate something with three legs (6) (D5, F12, J4, M9, H2, F5)
2. Swimmer possessing Spielberg character's charm (6) (C3, F8, D12, I12, G8, K9)
3. Artist reworked waterway (6) (B4, I5, M7, J1, D2, H1)
4. Wet blanket just covers female insect (9) (J2, I11, D10, E7, L12, J13, C3, L1, A9)
5. Feathers Icarus finally attached to arm resulting in fall (9) (F11, K12, I8, K5, G8, L7, J3, M5, B8)
6. Macho outfielder with superficial wound (3-6) (E3, M6, F3, J7, A1, D1, G9, B7, H4)
7. Gangster's smuggling worry (5) (C13, G3, A5, D3, J10)
8. In plot, class cheated (6) (A2, K4, H3, D8, F8, E2)
9. Channel carrying health resort news story (8) (E2, M11, D3, C2, F10, L11, E12, J9)
10. Need shower before and after travel way out West, once (5, 5) (K11, G5, J5, F3, M12, D4, H13, C1, A1, I6)
11. What a service station might do to obtain \$1,000 (6) (E3, A3, K11, J4, G12, M13)
12. Pardon four involved in counterfeit (7) (B10, H11, I11, E7, D9, H7, F8)
13. Marsupial's bill cut back (6) (E13, F3, B6, I7, G5, I10)
14. Hit head-on down at the end of steep hill (6) (I7, E5, H10, D13, G10, F11)
15. Take away two vehicles, backing up truck at first (8) (C10, I9, A10, B11, J11, G11, E12, M1)
16. Head of teachers has joint in administrative area (8) (G9, M2, H12, I6, L13, C7, J4, F9)
17. What disturbed member of the Brass family tree (8) (B1, G11, I8, H5, E4, K8, F1, L4)
18. Time-saving changes evoking pessimistic attitude (10) (L10, E6, J5, D10, A13, I12, H7, C9, G8, F6)
19. Stroke back of doggy with tool (6) (F4, M4, E9, K2, I3, J10)
20. Spot is absorbed by catty sound in pasture (6) (A8, L9, J1, E2, D7, I8)
21. A river in Italy the exec saw (8) (F2, E9, A12, H10, J9, H8, B8, G1)
22. Verbal authorization in ESPN broadcast (6) (K7, M3, B5, L3, J8, G6)
23. Trade for row behind me (6) (H9, I3, G9, D9, F7, K3)
24. Bracelet and piece of chain found in stew (8) (K9, I1, D11, F5, C6, A4, E10, J6)
25. Strong weed breaking net (6) (E9, L5, D13, I3, G6, K6)
26. Around charming woman, Ted acted jerky (8) (J10, L6, G4, D4, E12, A6, K10, L2)
27. Start to develop a headache in European capital (8) (A10, E5, F11, M8, K2, G10, D3, L11)
28. Fading bone in heap (8) (C12, D6, B3, E8, A2, M4, G6, J2)
29. Secures Rhode Island animal docs (6) (C5, I4, H7, B2, F13, K7)
30. At the center, watch aquatic mammal take unsteady steps (6) (H1, C4, D5, G7, J12, A11)
31. Frustrating flaw in article (9) (K1, H6, L7, G5, C8, A7, D2, D11, J5)
32. Be important framer, at times? (6) (F6, D10, H5, C11, G10, I11)
33. Squirrel with nugget around an hour after noon (8) (C6, J9, B9, I2, F6, E5, I13, L3)
34. Opening reel, before old Western (6) (H12, G4, I6, G13, E1, B12)
35. Set in plastic mug (5) (L13, E11, G2, I4, D11)
36. Baseball official wearing shirt backward takes the top prize (8) (D4, B13, G4, K13, A8, M10, L8, B4)

Note: The instructions above are for this month's puzzle only. It is assumed that you know how to decipher clues. For a complete introduction to clue-solving, send an addressed, stamped long envelope to The Atlantic Puzzler, 77 North Washington Street, Boston, Mass. 02114.

WORD WATCH

by Anne H. Soukhanov

bloatware *noun*, computer programs that use inordinate amounts of disk space and memory: "Many of the most popular programs . . . today are immense, top-heavy *bloatware* that do what they're supposed to do very well, but at cost of enormous resource requirements" (*The [Montreal] Gazette*).

BACKGROUND: This word goes back at least to 1991, when it referred in particular to software packages to which hundreds of features—many rarely used—had been added so that the packages could be marketed as "new" or "improved." Also dubbed *obese applications* or *El Bloato*, *bloatware* has led to countless computer upgrades and crashes.

economy class syndrome *noun*, thromboembolic episodes, sparked by the sudden forming of blood clots in the legs, among passengers who have remained immobile for long periods in cramped seating that impairs their circulation: "The phenomenon [is called] the '*economy class syndrome*,' as people with little leg space in a jet plane's less expensive seats are more likely to suffer such 'events' than passengers in roomy first-class seats" (*Jerusalem Post*).

BACKGROUND: This malady can also affect passengers on long train, bus, and car trips. Abbrevi-

A selection of terms that have newly been coined, that have recently acquired new currency, or that have taken on new meanings, compiled by the executive editor of The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language, Third Edition.

ated *ECS*, it was first described by Bryan Jennett, a Glasgow University professor emeritus of neurosurgery who, after a lengthy flight, suffered chest pains caused by a pulmonary embolus that had migrated from his leg to his lung. Preventive measures include moving about the cabin, doing in-seat exercises, drinking large quantities of nonalcoholic beverages, wearing loose clothing, and removing one's shoes.

killer litter *noun*, items thrown from the windows of tall buildings which can cause personal injury or property damage: "Welcome to Singapore, where the main danger facing a pedestrian isn't pickpockets or potholes but '*killer litter*'—junk tossed out of windows by residents of high-rise apartments" (*Wall Street Journal*).

BACKGROUND: *Killer litter*, a phenomenon attributed to the frustrations of high-rise living, has been reported in a number of Asian locales. Hong Kong recently ran an ad campaign urging high-rise dwellers not to throw things out their windows, and the government of Singapore has passed *killer-litter laws*, according to which of-

fenders can be fined the equivalent of \$175 and jailed for up to three months. Items cited in reports of *killer litter* include a tricycle, a blender, a flowerpot, an incense burner, and a television.

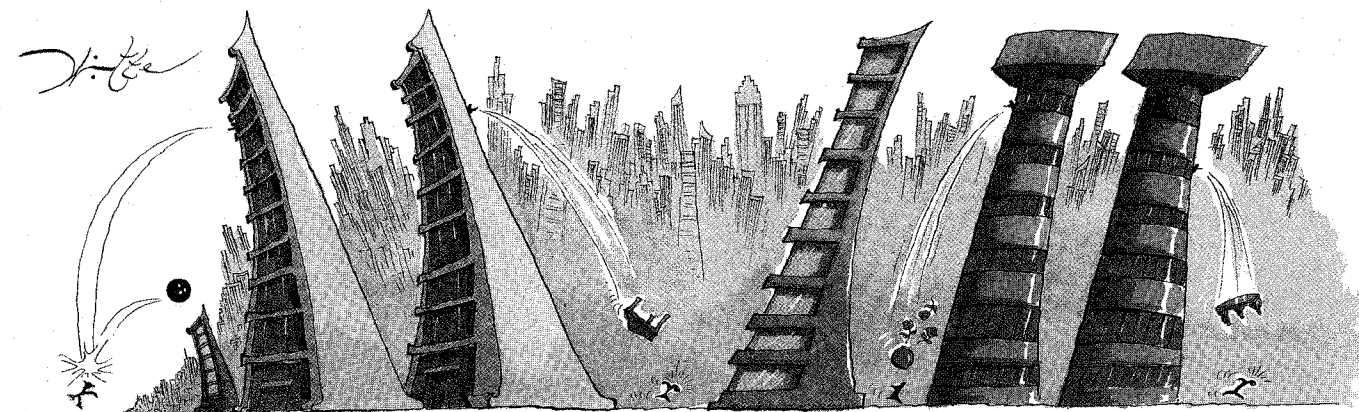
limber neck *noun*, the inability of diseased waterfowl to hold their heads up, causing them to drown if they try to swim: "The pelicans then succumb to avian botulism. . . . 'First, they lose their ability to fly. Then they can't swim and so they crawl up on shore. . . . they can't hold their heads up. We call it *limber neck*. . . . some birds will drop off the mud banks and try to swim, but their heads are underwater. And then they drown'" (Clark Bloom, manager of the Salton Sea National Wildlife Refuge, in *The Washington Post*).

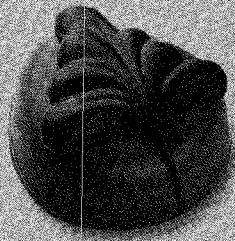
BACKGROUND: *Limber neck* is particularly rampant among waterfowl in California's Salton Sea, a 30-mile-long, 10-mile-wide body of water that was accidentally created when the Colorado River burst through a dike in 1905. The sea has become a major stopover on the Pacific Flyway, attracting millions of migra-

tory birds. Now fed only by runoff from industrial farmland and by some 25 million gallons a day of raw or partly treated sewage, the Salton Sea is about 20 percent saltier than the ocean and has water temperatures as high as 90°—perfect conditions for vibrio bacteria. The bacteria weaken fish and allow botulism spores in their guts to flourish; the botulism is then passed to the waterfowl that feed on the fish.

stigmatized house *noun*, a residence in which a crime or other notorious event has occurred: "The Brentwood condominium where Nicole Brown Simpson and Ronald Goldman were killed. And . . . the 'suicide mansion' in the San Diego suburbs where 39 cult members killed themselves. . . . From the cold dollars-and-cents real estate point of view, they're what's called '*stigmatized houses*'" (*Washington Post*).

BACKGROUND: *Stigmatized houses* can take years to sell, and even then they tend to go for less than market value. In some cases they are bought expressly to be torn down, either by developers who rebuild on the site or by members of the community who are eager to erase a source of negative associations and, in the process, to preserve their own property values.





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